

June 14, 2020 Pentecost 2A
A Great Time to Be the Church
Matthew 9:35-10:8

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.

Wouldn't it have been great to be the church there in the first century to get this authority from Jesus and go out and heal all kinds of diseases and drive out demons? Imagine coming home at night. Your spouse asked, "How was your day?" And you respond, "O, I cured a guy of leprosy. And there was little kid who had been blind since he was born. I fixed that. And I kicked the rear ends of a few troublesome demons." That would have been a great time to be the church.

Or how about in 1800's America when the nation was fighting over slavery? That would have been a great time to be the church and stand up and proclaim that all humans are created in God's image and that all people of every race are children of God. What a great time to proclaim the love of God for all people and make a huge difference in our nation and our world by being known by love. That would have been a great time to be the church.

Or what about when Madalyn Murray O'Hair challenged prayer in schools—what a great time for the church to stand up in the love of Christ and speak out against this movement which has fostered other anti-religious movements in our nation and even around the world. That would have been a great time to be the church.

Or during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's—that would have been a great time to be the church. To speak out the Good News to a world that needed to hear it. To live out the 2 greatest commandments—Love God and Love People. To be instruments of God's justice and help our nation

make sure everyone was treated the way God wanted them to be treated. That would have been a great time to be the church.

Or how about during the HIV and AIDS Epidemic. What an opportunity! I mean we have this commission and this authority from Jesus "*to heal every disease and every affliction.*" I can see the church there being the church and leading the charge to find healing for this horrible disease. That would have been a great time to be the church.

I think you see where I'm going here. In all of these examples the church failed to be the church.

The first century disciples, given authority over evil and demons and every kind of disease, we soon found locked behind closed doors, afraid for their lives.

The church of the 1800's caved to pressure and economics and human opinion and came down in favor of slavery as often as not.

When Madalyn Murray O'Hair challenged prayer in schools, this was an opportunity for the church to stand and speak out against this movement which has fostered other anti-religious movements in our nation and even around the world. The church failed to be the church in response to this attack.

When the civil rights movement evolved in the '60's, there were many churches who did not speak out in support of the rights of those marchers whose civil liberties were being violated in sight of the whole nation. In fact, forty years after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., declared the eleven o'clock hour on Sundays as the most segregated hour in this nation, it continues to be the most segregated hour of the week in this great nation. The church has failed to address this issue.

With the epidemic of HIV and AIDS running rampant in our country and countries around the world, it has not been until the last fifteen years that our government has begun to take it seriously, and still many of our congregations remain silent regarding the subject. Oh, we had some heated debates on the "sin of homosexuality" and the gay person's place in the church, but we did very little to heal disease.

Yet we have the story of Jesus in our text. Jesus went about the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowd, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless-like sheep without a shepherd.

Well, here we are again. It's a great time to be the church.

We don't have to go far or look far to see people who are harassed and helpless. We don't have to go far or to look deep to find opportunities to allow the mandate and commission of Christ to "Go and do" be realized. We don't have to turn over many rocks to find injustice.

Verse 37 of this text says, "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'

We are overwhelmed, but we are not overwhelmed with problems but with opportunities. There are opportunities for the church to be that visible witness of the kingdom of God in ways that our best preachers could never put in the most eloquent of words.

"Then Jesus summoned the twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to cure every disease and every sickness." We have already been given authority over every unclean spirit and sickness and disease. We can ease the dis-ease the people of God are living in by working in our churches, communities, and on our jobs and schools to send or bring help and hope.

This is a call to discipleship. This is an opportunity for you to be that disciple that Christ has given authority to bring help, health, hope, and wholeness to those who are marginalized in this region of our nation and indeed around the world. You have been commissioned. Will you go?

This is a great time to be the church!

Known by **LOVE**

Live by **FAITH**

Voice of **HOPE**