

Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23)^{iv v}

Then Jesus went about all 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 crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 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." Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. (Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents

and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.)

^{iv} **About Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23)**

Today's reading contains an introduction (9:36-38) and the beginning of the mission discourse (10:1-42), the third of the five main discourses that form the structural backbone of Matthew's gospel. In this discourse, Jesus invites his disciples to begin to participate in his service to the kingdom of God.

Jesus' ministry is identified as teaching, preaching and healing (4:23; 9:35). The people are "like sheep without a shepherd," a traditional description of the people of Israel when their leadership has failed (Ezekiel 34:1-6; Zechariah 10:2). He tells the disciples to ask God "to send out laborers." The harvest is often an image of the last judgment (13:39), already underway in Jesus' ministry.

The Twelve named disciples, recalling the twelve tribes of Israel, symbolize the fullness of the new covenant community. Jesus now gives them the authority to preach and heal (10:7-8), but reserves authority to teach until after the resurrection (28:20).

Like Jesus during his earthly ministry, the disciples are at this time to limit their ministry to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The exceptions (8:5-10, 15:21-28) foreshadow the

mission to the Gentiles (8:10-12, 28:19) validated by Jesus' resurrection and enthronement. The disciples show Jesus to the people, for their message and ministry is that of Jesus himself.

The greeting of "peace," shalom, is a dynamic word sent out by the speaker that, if it finds no effect in the hearer, returns to the speaker. If there is no response, the disciples are to disassociate themselves from that town by the prophetic action of shaking off its dust. The fate of Sodom and Gomorrah was a traditional illustration of God's judgment on wickedness (Genesis 18:16-19:28), but the judgment on unbelief will be more severe. Using the form of the commission of a prophet (Jeremiah 1:4-10), Matthew has outlined the authoritative mandate (28:18) and the mission of the disciples (28:19).

▼ Reflection and Response

On her exercise tape, celebrity Cher cracks a series of increasingly lame jokes, until her instructor, with mock exasperation says, "You think you're special, don't you." Just like an indulged child, Cher beams and says, "Yes, I do! My mother told me I was!"

This wholehearted love, this sense of being cherished and chosen, is the best gift that parents have to give or withhold. Freud once wrote that those people had security for life who knew that they were their mothers' darlings.

Conversely, cardiologist Meyer Friedman and his associate Diane Ulmer found a sad common link in some heart-disease-prone patients who were characterized by free-floating rage, a drive to compete and a low sense of self-esteem. The common link? These patients did not feel unconditionally loved and approved of by their parents. They felt neither cherished nor chosen.

Cherished and chosen, like Israel gathered at Mount Sinai. Against all odds, surely against the people's own expectations, they had escaped the powerful armies of oppressor Egypt. And here, at the foot of the holy mountain, this ragged group of former slaves hears unbelievable words from God.

"You are my cherished, my chosen, my very own." God speaks tenderly of carrying this people as on eagle's wings across the desert. (Surely only God can be so intimate with thousands of people at once?) "You are my possession, my treasure, the people I call to

myself.”

Just as incredible are the words Paul uses for our relationship with God. Once, we were strangers, even enemies of God, but now we are God’s friends. Cherished and chosen. But unbidden comes the question-chosen for what? We think of our struggles, small and large. “Why am I always left with the housework?” Or, harder, “Why was my job the first to go?” Or, harder still, “Why is my child sick and suffering?”

We may hear few responses. But as we turn to the gospel, we see Jesus choose his friends and send them out, two by two. They are chosen to share his ministry, his compassion and his sacrifice. No longer can they live for themselves. They are chosen, finally, for the cross.

The people gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai might have been excused for thinking their adventures were behind them. With the benefit of hindsight, we know the adventures were just beginning. God chooses us. God calls us friends. And so our adventure begins.

Quietly consider:

In what ways have I been chosen and cherished by God? by others?

How can I express my gratitude for this wonderful gift?

Prayer Starter

O Loving God, thank you for choosing, cherishing and inviting me to carry on your work by...