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## **The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**

**August 28, 2022**

### **Jesus Sends Workers to Proclaim the Good News**

Jesus came to save the world from the effects of sin, but he did not share that message with the world on his own. He commissioned his followers to spread the good news. Worship today provides special insights into the calling of full-time proclaimers of the gospel, the men we call pastors. This is a fitting theme as we welcome several students from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as members and install our senior assistant into his office.

#### **Sermon**

**Matthew 9:35-10:8**

**Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”**

**Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called 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 Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.**

**These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.”**

Introduction: About twenty years before the Civil War, German Lutherans began arriving in the forests north of Milwaukee. They cleared the land, planted crops, built homes and barns, and founded churches. Trinity in Freistadt was the first—1839—and soon after came Cedarburg and Kirchhain and lots of others. In the 1850s a group of Lutherans started a church on the Cedarburg Road. In 1861 another group founded a church on Mequon Road, and then in 1867 another on Wauwatosa Road. All three were in the township of Mequon: one on the south side, another on the east side, and the third on the west side. Eventually all three churches joined the Wisconsin Synod. Nobody in the synod knew much about those three churches except for the families who worshiped there. For that matter, nobody in the synod knew much about Mequon.

In 1925 the Wisconsin Synod purchased an 80-acre farm right in the middle of these three churches and built a new campus for its pastoral seminary. By that time Thiensville had become incorporated and the seminary’s address was Thiensville. Within a few years, people all over the synod knew Thiensville as well as they knew the name of their own towns. Young men who wanted to be pastors went to school in Thiensville. The seminary founded a church in Thiensville which became the seminary’s church. Just like before, nobody knew anything about Mequon, not the place and not the churches.

All that changed in 1962. By 1962 time, Mequon had become a fast-growing city and the seminary moved to Mequon—at least on paper. For the last 60 years members of the Wisconsin Synod have connected their seminary to our city. From San Diego to Seattle to Saginaw to Savannah, Mequon means Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. So Dad says, “My son is enrolled in Mequon” and just about everyone at his church knows what he means: His son is preparing to be a pastor at the seminary. In the minds of most WELS members today, Trinity Church in Mequon and St. John’s Church in Mequon have a connection with the seminary in Mequon that they envy. I mean, the seminary is less than a ten-minute drive!

So maybe today is a good day for us Mequon Lutherans to think about the pastoral ministry. The seminary started classes this week and 120 students—mostly young but a few older—began their work. Today we’re installing a seminary student as an assistant in our congregation and we’re looking forward to having seminary families as members and visitors. So we’re leaving Luke’s Gospel this morning and opening Matthew where Matthew shares an important account from Jesus’ ministry. We see

### **The Savior’s Plan for Proclaimers**

Jesus moved around in all the areas of the Palestine, but he spent the longest time and maybe the busiest time in Galilee. For 18 months **Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness.** One thing was consistent wherever he went and that was the sad spiritual situation of the people who lived there. Matthew tells that **when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** The compassion Jesus felt for these people went deep down into his bones. These people were sinners for sure and were often way too gullible, but their big problem came from their religious leaders. By this time in Israel’s history the Jewish religion was all about obedience and not about God’s mercy. Leaders invented silly laws and placed ridiculous burdens on people and then they insisted that obedience was the only way to find God’s favor. It was sheer spiritual torture. People lived under the constant threat of rejection. Sometimes they just gave up.

Jesus had the answer for this, obviously. Mercy and compassion were the themes of Jesus’ ministry. He came to obey what people could not obey and he endured the punishment for their disobedience. That’s what Good Friday and Easter were all about. He preached the good news of the kingdom and the good news was that their sins were forgiven. But there were too many people, too many in Galilee and too many everywhere else. He couldn’t preach the good news to all of them and his time on earth was coming to an end. **Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”**

The medical industry is very good at arousing sympathy. I can get teary when I see a little child with no hair struggling with cancer. I wonder sometimes if we feel the same compassion for people who are diseased and dying because of sin. Little children with no hair can still believe in Jesus and find the gate of heaven, but people without faith in Jesus are headed for the gates of hell. They aren’t without blame for sure, but they have been deceived by priests and imams and shamans and rabbis and quacks to look for spiritual security in someone or something other than Jesus. Have we become so secure in our own life with God that we forget how terrible and gruesome it is to live and die without Jesus? Again and again on the pages of Gospels, we see the compassion Jesus had for people trapped in sin and we have seen that compassion in our own lives. Jesus urges us today to share his compassion for people and to face up to the sad fate of those who are without him.

This compassion is exactly what led our synod to establish a seminary. Pastors and laypeople knew how important it was to prepare proclaimers of the kingdom. But pastors and missionaries don’t just appear out of nowhere; they don’t grow on trees. St. Paul wrote, **Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers.** For all their flaws and all their weaknesses, all who offer themselves for the full-time ministry of the gospel are gifts from God. That’s why Jesus urges us to pray to the Lord of the harvest. He’s the one who gives us workers. Our prayer is that God would give us more of them. As those prayers flow from our hearts, actions flow from our minds. We recruit sons and grandsons, we welcome students to worship, we support them with our offerings. We think of the seminary’s work as our work and so we imitate the Savior’s compassion and add more workers to the ranks of proclaimers.

Jesus took the lead in this work. He saw the hundreds who were following him and selected a small group. **He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.** What I have done, Jesus said, I want you to do: Preach with power. He gave them directions: **Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.** He gave them a message. **As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'** He gave them the power to back up their preaching: **Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.** And then he sent them out on their first missionary journey. It was the first of many journeys that would follow.

Jesus had a plan for proclaimers then and he has a plan for them now. Not everyone can serve as a pastor, but the Lord quietly guides those with the gifts, the temperament, and the passion to preach the good news. Even before he ascended, Jesus expanded their territory; **Go and make disciples of all nations,** he said. The message he gave the first Twelve he still gives: **Preach the gospel to every creature.** And he still provides the power that stands behind their preaching, not miracles, resurrections, or exorcisms, but the power of the Spirit working through the Word.

Probably without thinking about it too much, you have been blessed with an almost unique situation in our synod. You have an opportunity to be an important part of the Savior's work at the seminary. Only two other congregations in our entire synod are as close to the seminary as your congregation is. Unlike hundreds of thousands of WELS members, you can attend concerts and services. You can work with and welcome students. You can visit the campus and see where students live and learn. And I suggest that the more you become part of the seminary's work, the more you will feel your compassion deepen; the more you will notice that your prayers will increase; and the more you will discover that your appreciation for these gifts of God grows.

As Jesus prepared the twelve for their first missionary journey, he reminded them of this truth: **Freely you have received; freely give.** Jesus addresses the same words to you and me. At our baptism Jesus wrapped his loving arms around us. Through childhood he taught us the simple truths of his grace. As adults he brought us to the Word and the sacrament to forgive our sins and strengthen our faith. And now as most of us become older, he points us to a final place, an eternal place where aches and pains will be gone and we will live in perfect happiness forever. As we imitate the Savior's compassion and as we follow his lead, we remember this: **Freely you have received; freely give.** Amen.