

“THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD”

Matthew 9:35-10:8

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June 15, 2008

You've all seen those advertisements that entice us with their lucrative offers and promise of a bright future. Sell a certain product and you can make \$ 5,000 a week in your spare time. You know what I am talking about. My dad always reminded me that “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!” Those of you who know me know that my wife is a nurse. Now because there is a nursing shortage, she receives job offers constantly. They come in the mail unsolicited. Usually they arrive on a full-color five-by-seven post card. Recently one caught my eye: “Come to Hawaii!” There is a hospital willing to pay moving costs, a substantial signing bonus, and a very lucrative salary, with the promise of regular increases. Fortunately for me, my wife is committed to staying in Cleveland and teaching at Kent State University. But not to take any chances, I threw the post card in the wastebasket before she got home from work!

Have you ever fantasied about your dream job? What would it entail? Shorter hours? More pay? Longer vacations? More prestige? A bigger office? This morning I want to offer you **the best job in the world**. You don't need more education, another degree or more experience to apply. You are qualified to start right now. Today!

Before I can describe the best job in the world, I need to give you a little background. In today's Gospel lesson, we heard about the ministry of Jesus. Three words describe that ministry: **teaching, preaching and healing**. First of all, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus' preaching and teaching is both controversial and counter cultural. According to Madison Avenue, the person with the most toys wins. Jesus, however, proclaims that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and that relationships are more important than things. True joy comes from discovering and doing God's will, regardless of what others may do or say or think.

Jesus not only preaches and teaches, he also heals those who are suffering afflictions of body, mind and spirit. He calls people to leave the distractions of this world behind and follow him in order to gain focus and perspective for their lives. He is in such command of his own spirit and so filled with God's grace that he can perform miracles. The lame walk; the blind see; the confused and misguided have their perspective restored.

Jesus spends time with the common people, those who love him the deepest and have the most appreciation for his ministry. He also confronts the authorities of his day, bringing into question their values and their judgment. He is not afraid to speak up and speak out when the laws of the people appear to contradict the laws of God and when the spirit of the law seems to conflict with the letter of the law. Although he was not afraid of conflict, the Bible tells us over and over again that he was a person of compassion. Never harsh or unfeeling, Jesus confronted

people because he loved them and wanted the best for them.

Because Jesus offered the help and hope that people need, he was immensely popular. People of all walks of life flocked to hear his teaching, to have him heal their bodies, or simply receive a reassuring pat on the back from his gentle hand or a smile from his kind face. Recognizing that all people are in need of God and the touch of God's loving hand upon their lives, Jesus proclaims to his disciples, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.*" (9:37)

Then Jesus takes a bold step. For three years the disciples have been roaming the countryside with Jesus — hearing his words, observing his actions, rubbing elbows with him as he ministered to the needs of the multitudes. Now the Bible tells us that Jesus summoned them, not made a suggestion or gave them a polite invitation, but summoned them and "*gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.*" (10:1)

What was Jesus thinking, giving his mission to these twelve? It is clear from the Gospel that Jesus does not intend to work alone. But consider who he chose to help him. First there was Simon, also known as Peter, who confessed true faith, but who also spoke Satan's words to Jesus, who denied Jesus three times and then ran away. There was his brother Andrew, who started out strong as an evangelist, but soon faded into the background. There were James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus nicknamed them the Sons of Thunder because of all the commotion they caused. There were Philip and Bartholemew, who must have been quiet men. There was Thomas, who was at least honest about his doubts. Last week we talked about Matthew the tax collector, whose very presence in the group would have discredited Jesus' ministry in the eyes of some. There was James the son of Alphaeus, not to be confused with the other James (but he didn't seem to do anything that would give us reason to confuse him with anybody else.) There was Thaddeus and Simon the Canaanite — we don't know much about them. And finally, there was Judas Iscariot — the one who betrayed his Lord. Not exactly an Olympic team!

Couldn't Jesus have done a better job of selecting those who would be his representatives in the world? Matthew calls them "disciples." A "disciple" is a follower who learns and a learner who follows. Well, the Gospels give us the impression that these fellows had a lot to learn, and they certainly needed an example to follow! In every case, Jesus saw something in them that other people failed to see. They were just ordinary people in whom Jesus recognized God-given potential. He saw it before others did. He saw in them things they did not see in themselves. But eventually, these twelve, this motley crew changed the world.

Their assignment, unbelievable as it must have first sounded to them, was to do what Jesus was doing: "*proclaim the good news...cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.*" Can't you just hear the disciples saying, "What? We can't do that! We haven't been to seminary. We aren't even very spiritual people." But Jesus will accept none of their excuses.

Now, after Jesus gives them authority and commissions them for service, he calls them "apostles." That's a dangerous word, especially when it's applied to people like the these twelve. An apostle is a person who is sent out on a mission. An apostle of Christ is a person sent and empowered with the message of the Gospel and the mandate to put it into action. Jesus made these twelve people builders of the kingdom of God! He trusted them with the message of salvation. And, I repeat, these twelve, this motley crew, literally changed the world.

Later on in the Gospel, following the resurrection, Jesus will send the disciples into the world to “*make disciples of all nations.*” (28:19) For now, he is sending them to the lost sheep of Israel. Clearly there is a parallel between the twelve tribes of Israel and the choosing of twelve people to participate in this mission. If Jesus and his followers had started taking their message to the Gentile world at this stage, no self-respecting Jew would have paid them any more attention. It would appear to have confirmed Jesus’ enemies taunts that he is in league with the devil.

But he isn’t. He has come not to destroy but to fulfill. Israel’s God is indeed the creator God, who loves the whole world and intends to save it, to call the Gentiles as well as Jews. But the way he will do that is precisely by fulfilling his promises to Israel. That is Jesus’ focus and concern, as the later church recognized. The time for the Gentiles will come. For the moment, every effort must be made to tell the people of Israel that their greatest moment, the fulfillment of their dreams has arrived. Yes, the disciples are to take Jesus’ message to the whole world, but they are clearly instructed to start at home.

If we are to be authentic witnesses for Jesus, we, too, must start at home. We must begin by getting our own houses in order. If our witness is to be credible, we must be apostles for Christ at the breakfast table, when we are in a long line of stalled traffic, and when we are in the check-out line at Heinen’s or Giant Eagle. Being a faithful disciple begins at home.

Now some will say, there’s so much to be done right here, in our local community that we need to spend all our energies here and not worry about the rest of the world. While we will probably never solve all our problems locally, Christ also calls us to a broader mission, as the Great Commission proclaims. When we see the needs in other parts of the world, it gives us a better perspective on what God may be calling us to do and how God expects us to use our resources. In January of 2006, my wife and I and Ginny Steiger were part of a mission work trip to Costa Rica. We stayed in a poor area where people cannot afford hot water heaters. For ten days, we took showers in cold water. To this day, every time I turn on the water for a shower I thank God for the blessing of hot water, which before that trip I simply took for granted.

God is calling us to serve him. The same call that came to the first twelve disciples comes to us. We have been disciples long enough. Now God wants us to be his apostles, those he is sending out to teach, preach and heal the world. Where does God want you to go? Our location is not that important. When I was a District Superintendent, pastors would describe to me the ministry setting in which they felt they could be the most effective. It was always somewhere different from where they were serving at the time! The truth is, we can do ministry anywhere. We can serve God in any situation. Location is not the pressing consideration. Obedience is the issue. The *Plain Dealer* promises to bring us news “from around the corner and around the world.” God is calling us to serve him around the corner and around the world. Folks need to hear the message of Jesus whether they live across the street or on the other side of the globe.

Our job, if you will, is to tell people that God loves them. We are to do as Jesus did: preach, teach and heal. Not everyone is gifted in public speaking. But all of us can be witnesses to the love of God. It was St. Francis who said, “*Preach always; use words when necessary.*” If you preach with your life, the words will come when you need them.

We are called not only to preach and to teach, but to heal. Jesus sends his disciples to the margins of society where hope has gone stale. He bids us to go to places of great poverty,

sickness, high mortality, and great discontent with life. God wants us to go to those places that would be easy for us to avoid — places where we don't want to go, places of pain, even places where we may be in harm's way.

There are plenty of job openings and job opportunities where the Gospel is concerned. As in Jesus' day, "*the harvest is plentiful; the laborers are few.*" I saw a picture recently of a long line of people waiting for applications at a place that was hiring workers. There's not a long line to be an apostle! In fact, you can start today! You won't get laid off, and the benefits are heavenly!

Do you see why I call it **the best job in the world**? To be an apostle of Jesus Christ, all you have to do is to tell people by your words and your actions about the grace of God. All you have to do is tell people that God loves them and cares about them. There's no better job than that! People are literally dying to hear that word. Miracle of miracles, Jesus is calling you and Jesus is calling me to spread that word, to go and tell everyone that God loves them and cares for them and sent his son to die for them.

Yes, we are called, commanded and sent in Christ's name. God is summoning us to preach, teach and heal, to share the love of Christ with persons everywhere. It is an awesome assignment. I am convinced it is **the best job in the world**.

Prayer: O God, although you don't ask most of us to quit our day jobs, help us to sense your call to preach, teach and heal. May we hear your voice, and follow where you lead. Amen.