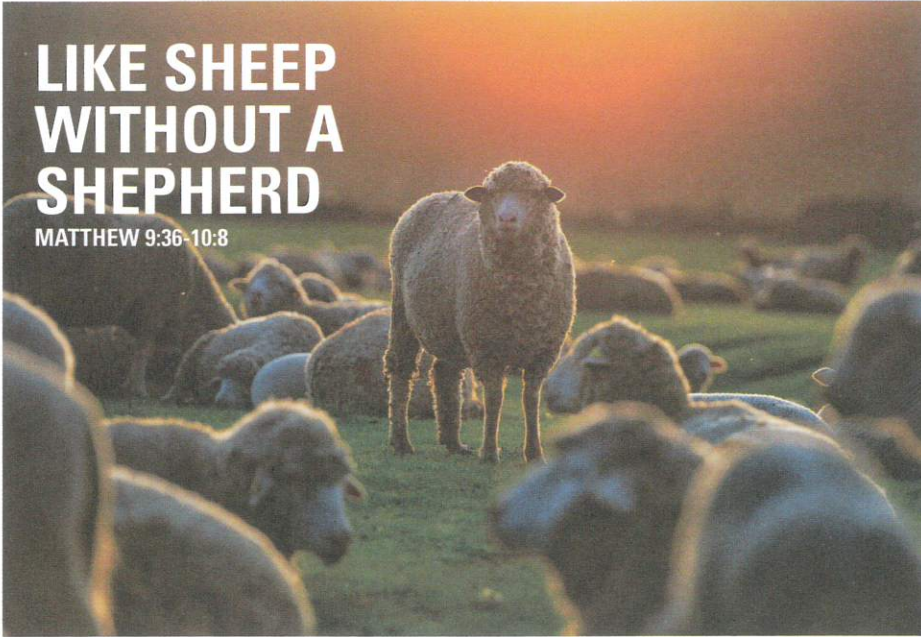


LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD

MATTHEW 9:36-10:8



The second of the great sermons in Matthew's Gospel is often called 'the Mission Discourse.' It is addressed to Jesus' close disciples rather than to the crowd at large.

It can be found in chapter ten, and we will read parts of it over the next three Sundays. It begins with a short overture describing the compassion of Jesus for the 'harassed and dejected' crowd, like sheep without a shepherd.

This was literally true of the Galilean peasants of his day. Absentee landlords exploited them, they were taxed to the hilt by an occupying power, and their own local ruler, Herod, was incompetent and corrupt. The image of Israel like a flock without a shepherd is taken from chapter thirty-four of the Book of Ezekiel. In this long prophecy, Ezekiel lays out the state of the nation. They have been forced into exile by a foreign power, their 'shepherds,' the royal house of David, have lost power with the result that the people ('the sheep') are lost and awaiting a true shepherd who will reunite them. For Ezekiel, this 'new David' was a figure of the future. Jesus, born in the city of David, becomes the good shepherd who will lead them with love and compassion.

The image now shifts to labouring in the harvest. This is a common image in the Gospels for the mission of the Church. Jesus calls the first group of the labourers, the twelve disciples who have been closest to him. They will share his ministry both in preaching and in the works of power. The names of the twelve are then given. The choice of twelve disciples reflects the twelve tribes of the people of Israel. They will be responsible, first of all, for gathering in the harvest of historical Israel and then for widening its boundaries by gathering in the harvest of the Gentiles.

The mission discourse proper begins with a word addressed to the twelve about their immediate mission and a marking off of the mission territory. As fellow-workers with the Lord of the harvest, their mission, like his, will be addressed, first of all, to the Jewish people. For the moment, they are to avoid pagan territory. Neither are they at this stage to engage in mission to the Samaritans. The Samaritans had broken off from the main branch of Judaism many centuries before but had retained the Law and their own priesthood and, for a time, their own temple. There was mutual hostility between the two groups, though Jesus does show concern for Samaritans (e.g. parable of the Good Samaritan, the encounter with a Samaritan woman who not only becomes a believer herself but draws her fellow townsmen and women to him in John 4).

Like Jesus, the twelve's mission will consist of preaching the word that the kingdom of God is close at hand and performing the same kind of works of power – curing the sick (even raising the dead) and engaging in conflict with the powers of evil. The call to mission is not a call to a career but to the gracious working of free grace. They received the grace without payment and so should not expect payment in return. ■

REFLECT

That mission of twelve peasant men in Galilee long ago is the beginning of the Church's mission. Mission is the Church's 'unfinished business' with the world. If the Church ever gets trapped in its own concerns, it has lost its vision of what Jesus has called it to be. Times and mission strategies may have changed but priority must always be given to the simple message that the Kingdom of God is close at hand and that it makes a difference to human life. ■



SAY

"Jesus is the Good Shepherd who shows me the way to salvation."

LEARN

As baptised members of the Church, we all share in its mission to preach the Gospel.

The Church is missionary by its very nature.

One does not have to travel abroad or even leave home to be a missionary.

DO

Think about your baptismal calling. What does it mean to you? How committed are you to witnessing to the Gospel?

PRAY

Pray for people who are oppressed and exploited throughout the world, as the people of Israel were in the time of Jesus. Pray that they will experience liberation from all that oppresses them.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

O Lord, hear my voice, for I have called to you; be my help.
Do not abandon or forsake me, O God, my Saviour!

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

O God, strength of those who hope in you,
graciously hear our pleas,
and, since without your mortal fragility can do nothing,
grant us always the help of our grace,
that in following your commands
we may please you by our resolve and our deeds.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Exodus 19:2-6

A reading from the book of Exodus.

From Rephidim the sons of Israelites set out again; and when they reached the wilderness of Sinai, there in their wilderness they pitched their camp; there facing the mountain Israel pitched camp. Moses then went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountains, saying, 'say this to the House of Jacob, declare this to the Egyptians, how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to hold fast to my covenant, you of all the nations shall be my very own, for all the earth is mine. I will count you a kingdom of priests, a consecrated nation.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 99:2-3, 5 Rv. 3

Response:

We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

1. Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before him, singing for joy (R.)
2. Know that he, the Lord, is God. He made us, we belong to him. We are his people, the sheep of his flock (R.)

3. Indeed, how good is the Lord, Eternal his merciful love. He is faithful from age-to-age (R.)

SECOND READING

Roman 5:6-11

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans

We were still helpless when at his appointed moment Christ died for sinful men. It is not easy to die even for a good man- though of course for someone really worthy, a man might be prepared to die- but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Having died to make us righteous, is it likely that he would now fail to save us from Gods anger? When we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, we were still enemies; now that we have been reconciled surely, we may count on being saved by life of his Son? Not merely because we have been reconciled but because we are filled with joyful trust in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have already gained our reconciliation.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice, says the Lord,
I know them and they follow me. Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Matthew 9:36-10:8

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest." He summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them to follow:

'Do not turn your steps to pagan territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.'

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

**I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.**

**I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,**

**born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
(all bow during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

O God, who in the offerings presented here
Provide for the two-fold needs of human
nature,
Nourishing us with food
And renewing us with your Sacrament, grant,
we pray,
That the sustenance they provide
May not fail us in body or in spirit.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**There is one thing I ask of the Lord; this do
I seek:
To live in the house of the Lord all the days
of my life.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

As this reception of your Holy Communion,
O Lord,
foreshadows the union of the faithful in you,
so may it bring about unity in your Church.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.