

“As You Go”

Introduction: It would seem that, if Jesus had ever taken a course on marketing, given the instructions we’ve just heard him share with his disciples, he might want to repeat that class for I’m not sure anyone would want to buy what he’s selling! You have to admit that it certainly wasn’t a great sales pitch, especially, as we heard Jesus explain last week, when there was a shortage of laborers in the harvest field. Now, I certainly don’t mean to be crass, only to acknowledge that joining Jesus on the mission of God does not promise to be easy or comfortable, and that Jesus seems to want us to know right up front the kinds of things we may face so that they don’t surprise us or dismay us or knock us off course.

Last week we saw how Jesus began to move his followers from simply “being along for the ride” to actually getting behind the wheel themselves as he sent them out to extend the mission on which the Father had called him. Accordingly, the Twelve are designated here as “apostles,” which means “those sent with the authority of the one doing the sending,” and so we hear that they are to proclaim the good news of the kingdom as he had, and heal many from disease, demons, and death, as he had.

Putting it into a larger context, if in Ma 5-7, we hear Jesus instruct us through the Sermon on the Mount about what life lived in the kingdom of God looks like, and if in Ma 8-9 we’ve been led to understand who the King is and what his authority looks like, then in Ma 10 we’re invited to consider what it looks like to move out and share both with the people around us.

I. The Focus of The Mission

A. Jesus’ instructions begin with a particular mission to what Jesus calls the “lost sheep of Israel” (vv. 5-15) and then looks out to what would become a mission to all the nations of the world (vv. 16-23). The restriction up front to go first to Israel and not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans actually is a reminder that it was God’s desire to bless the nations through the witness of God’s people Israel. Long ago God had promised that through the descendants of Abraham, all nations on earth will be blessed (Ge. 12:1-3; 22:18). This was an opportunity for Jesus to say, “You people who have been chosen for this specific purpose, your moment in the sun is still here; don’t miss it!” Sadly, many seemed like they might.

B. Now, in the gospel accounts we do see Jesus ministering to various Gentiles and Samaritans, but only those who’ve taken the initiative to come to him. He would go to them later, after his resurrection, through those who had come to follow him. What I’d like us to consider are some of the principles Jesus wants us to understand, no matter who we go to. “As you go . . .” what would it be helpful to keep in mind as Jesus sends us out?

II. The Focus of Our Hearts: “As you go...”

A. *Expect God to work.* We see this in a couple of places. First, Jesus charges them with doing in no way what they could do on their own: healing those plagued by disease, demons, and even death. Second, when arrested, as they speak to and defend themselves before governors and kings, the Holy Spirit, Jesus promises, will give them what to say. Their words will be the Spirit of the Father speaking through them. In both cases, as they speak and heal, we see the authority and power of God working alongside his people. Jesus does not send us out with a pat on the back while wishing us “good luck.” Instead, as the gospel of Matthew ends, he promises to be with us in authority and power:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations . . . And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (28:18-20).

It's puzzling, of course, that we certainly don't see lots of healing going on around us, and I can't tell you when the last time I saw a dead person be raised, and there are many times it seems like I don't know what to say, but could it be that our expectations of God are too weak? Could it be that he is with us and desires to work more powerfully and authoritatively through us, but we're not convinced that he can, and so he doesn't? I'm not sure, but I do wonder... [Phil Yancey: "God goes where he's wanted."]

B. *Go in word and in deed.* Speaking to the soul and caring for the body are also, on a broader level, what proclaiming and healing are all about. We need to be ready to give the reason for the hope that we have, and we need to be ready to show mercy to those lying in some way "by the side of the road." Showing that we care, explaining why we care, if we only do one of these it minimizes Jesus and leaves our witness incomplete. But when we do both, it creates a powerful witness to a watching world.

C. *Trust God to provide.* Jesus' instructions did not include a large fundraising effort, or that his people acquire a bunch of equipment. They were to trust that in the towns where they went that they would find hospitality that would provide for them. His teaching in the Sermon that they not worry about what they would eat, drink, or wear, but that they seek first his kingdom, was being put to the test! His promise was not that his followers would get rich proclaiming and healing but that he would sustain them and see that their needs were met.

D. *Be prepared to meet opposition.* Because they had thrown their lot in with Jesus, and were pursuing an entirely different way of being and living from those in the world around them, and, because what they were revealing left no room for middle ground, for fence sitting, they could expect that various townsfolk, government and religions officials, and even family members, would not be happy. In some cases, they would strike out against them. But opposition will not be the last word.

Peter, one of the Twelve, puts this well (1 Pe. 4:12f):

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Suffering is not something to be avoided at all costs. Don't be surprised by it and know it can be the means of furthering our union with him and revealing his glory to the world.

E. *Be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.* The metaphor reverses here from going to the lost sheep to being sheep themselves, sheep who are being sent out in the midst of wolves! Be alert to the possible dangers, the temptations and traps the world holds, Jesus counsels, but don't allow such wariness to make you hard of heart.

There is, in this phrase, a spirit of humility that Jesus is calling us to, I think, and I wonder if this is where we might think about the difference between believing that we possess the truth, vs. a posture of wanting to pursue the truth. Soong-Chan Rah, professor of evangelism at Fuller Seminary, reflects on this distinction. He observes that if the church believes it possesses the truth, it sets up boundaries to preserve its worldview from the encroachment of a secular culture at all costs, and to determine who is in and who is out in the Christian faith. In this way of approaching evangelism, each side claims a version

of the truth and the goal is to convince the other. Quite often, conflict and contention, rather than transformation, is the result. By way of contrast, a posture of truth pursued, rather than truth possessed, doesn't minimize or eliminate the reality of truth, but it calls for a humility that says we don't own the truth, that God is its author, and, as we go, can we not fight over whose version is superior but to pursue it and discover it with the other, together? [Fuller Magazine, Issue 22, "The Evangelical Pursuit of Truth"]

Perhaps that is the spirit which accompanies Peter's call to always be ready to share the reason for hope that we have, but to do so with "gentleness and respect" (1 Pe. 3:15). It's a spirit that doesn't seek to conquer the other but to be on a journey with the other.

F. *Do not be afraid.* This comes a bit later in his instructions and it might be best to quote Jesus in his entirety in which he repeats this injunction three times in light of the persecution his followers are likely to face:

²⁶ "So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

We need not fear because evil will not be able to remain hidden forever; because though physical death may threaten, or even overtake us, our eternal destiny is secure; because the Father's care is sovereign over all things, even the smallest bird and coin and strand of hair on our head!

What sums this up is the promise of Jesus to be with us always, forever, even, as the psalmist puts it, when we walk through the darkest valleys (23:4). Like Jesus in this text from Matthew, Psalm 23 is reflective of the Bible's honesty about life. It doesn't depict an easy journey, even and maybe especially when we are walking in the way of mission. Jesus wants us to know going in that, not only is there no better place to be than with him, but also that when we find ourselves in the valley we don't have to live fearfully because our Good Shepherd has not forgotten or forsaken us. He is with us, as light through darkness.

"I am the light of the world," he declares. "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life," he promises (Jn. 8:12).

So let us not shrink from his mandate to be proclaimers and teachers and healers of the good news he has bought, and desires to continue to bring, through us.