
Who are the Disciples?

A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
Third Sunday After Pentecost
Genesis 18:1-15
Matthew 9:35-10:8

When Jesus 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." --Matthew 9:36-37

So Jesus gathered his folks around himself, and he said,

"You go out. You do it. You proclaim the good news. You cure the sick, raise the dead, and cleanse the lepers. You cast out demons. You received freely; so give freely, too."

And the names of those people around him. Who were they? Simon, and James, and Andrew, and Philip and Bartholomew?

Well, those were the names of the people last time around. But guess what? There is a new group now. This is a new generation. Today, Jesus has lawyers and bankers around him, real estate agents and developers, social service workers, all parents, and even politicians.

Their names are Sam, and Carolynne. Sarah is there. Joe, Mary, and Susan. Brad and Doug. Todd is there, and Bobbie and Elizabeth. Every housewife in the country is there. Every business leader is there. Every father, and every mother. Every sister, and every brother.

And he says, "You do it. You go out. Proclaim some good news. Cure the sick. Raise the dead. Cleanse the lepers. Cast out demons."

"Cast out demons?" we ask. What does that mean? It means getting rid of the goblins under that child's bed. Many of you have done that, haven't you? You have cast out demons. It means defanging the threatening ogres at your workplace. You've done that, too. It means casting out the beasts of envy and jealousy in your business relationships. Casting out demons means reconciling angry personal relationships.

There is still a lot of that that needs to be done, isn't there? Consider the demons, the goblins, the threats, and the fears that face us every day: anger, jealousy, envy, bitterness. The harvest of those who need to be healed is great.

"Cure the sick." Sure, the doctors and nurses and caregivers perform this task daily. I give thanks for the great givers in our medical professions! They are tireless heroes in our present environment of complicated medical bureaucracy. They are the disciples of Jesus. And so are some of us. There are sicknesses that cannot be healed by the latest drugs and pharmaceutical miracles. Soul sickness is our most common malady in this age.

Soul sickness: boredom and inertia and emptiness.

Some of that sickness has led to death itself. Who can raise the dead? Jesus sends you and me to do it. Raising the dead. Getting teen-agers out of bed in the middle of the morning. Getting your spouse into gear. But raising the dead is also rejuvenating a dying business or a bankrupt company. Raise the dead just like you stay with a dormant garden in your yard. Stay with the challenge. Tend and fertilize and prune. Raise the dead.

Cleanse the lepers, Jesus said. Who are the lepers today? They are the unclean. They are the people no one seems to want to be around. They just give off strange vibes and odd auras. How can we clean those who seem so dirty? We touch them. Jesus cleansed the lepers by daring to touch what other people considered unclean.

That harvest is still plentiful.

What do you imagine people think when they see you coming toward them? What do you imagine people think when they see the Church?

Far too often, when the Church arrives, people think, "Oh. Oh." I don't mean just in the hospitals, where the chaplain always has sign over her head: "Bad news is coming."

No, I mean that some Christians seem to always have that sign over their heads, "Bad news here. I have come to deliver the next round of bad news into your life.'

Jesus said go out and proclaim Good News. Go out and say something good for a change! So, what do people think when they see you coming? Here's the purveyor of something discouraging? Or, are you a proclaimer of Good News?

Jesus knows there are plenty of helpless and harassed crowds around these days. Those jobs have already been taken. We've got enough of the helpless and harassed.

You go out now, and you and you and you go out. You don't have to single-handedly pull in the whole harvest. All God requires of us is to do our part where we are. It might be just in our company. Or only in our division of the business. It might be just in our city, or even only in our neighborhood. It might be just in our own family, or it might be just with our own partner.

Wherever we are, we have freely received something when we follow Jesus. We have received grace and truth, and comfort and love. It is time now to freely give.

Why is it that we are so accustomed to receiving freely, but so scared of giving freely?

Where is the faith of Abraham and Sarah?

In the heat of the day, by the oaks of Mamre, the Lord appeared to them. Abraham looked up and saw three men. Was it three men, or was it the Lord? They were the same.

Abraham acted. Abraham and Sarah served the strangers. Abraham and Sarah fetched the water, and the fresh flour cakes, and the curds and the milk and the calf, and they served these strangers -these strangers who turned out to be the Lord. They freely gave.

And when they freely gave, a miracle occurred. Life was conceived in them. When they served these hungry strangers in the middle of the desert, Abraham and Sarah conceived in their old bodies, and new life developed.

It takes courage to serve. It takes boldness. It takes faith. The characteristics of true faith these days are not our tedious legislations about doctrine. Faith is about the courage to hope, the courage to serve, the courage to proclaim good news, the courage to touch the unclean and raise the stinking dead.

Abraham and Sarah had faith, and a miracle developed inside them. They gave freely, and, thus, hope was born to them. It was a hope so wonderful, that all they could do was laugh. They named that new life, "son of laughter."

The world still needs this bold and confident hope. The world still needs people who have confidence and faith to share. There is Good News to proclaim. We are not meant to be the harassed and helpless. We are meant to be the proclaimers and healers!

AMEN.

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