

Second Presbyterian Church
June 14, 2026 || Year A – Third Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 9:35-10:8

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew.

‘Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages,
teaching in their synagogues
and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom
and curing every disease and every sickness.
When he 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;
therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples
and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out,
and to cure every disease and every sickness.
These are the names of the twelve apostles:
first, Simon, also known as 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 Cananaean
and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions:
“Do not take a road leading to gentiles,
and do not enter a Samaritan town,
but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’
Cure the sick;
raise the dead;
cleanse those with a skin disease;
cast out demons.
You received without payment; give without payment.”

For the word of God in scripture,
for the word of God among us,
for the word of God within us.

Thanks be to God.

Having journeyed from the fullness of our week, we enter the wilderness of worship.

We camp in this wilderness and wait to hear the words that God will speak to us.

In this wilderness of worship, God brings us to God's self and speaks a clear word –

Obey my voice.

Keep my covenant.

Be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

And we answer as one, "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do."

Everything? We will do everything the Lord has spoken?

The kingdom of heaven draws near – God's transcendence becomes immanent in Jesus –

the voice we are to obey speaks through Jesus;

the covenant we are to keep is renewed in Jesus;

the priestly kingdom and holy nation we are to be is modeled in Jesus.

And everything that the compassionate Jesus speaks we will do.

Jesus viscerally moves through the world –

Jesus tender-heartedly enters politically powerful urban cities and often ignored small villages.

Jesus enters both places to teach and restore all that is physically and morally dis-eased.

Jesus enters both places, sees the diseased urban and rural crowds, and has compassion for those who are harassed, oppressed, and forcefully thrown down.

They are like sheep without a shepherd because – as the prophet Ezekiel so wisely proclaimed¹ – the false shepherds focused on feeding themselves instead of strengthening the weak. The false shepherds hoarded resources instead of healing the sick and binding up the injured. The false shepherds ruled with force and harshness instead of bringing back the strays and seeking the lost.²

Jesus sees the damage done by these false shepherds and has compassion.

Jesus sees the damage done – sees the plentiful harvest – and Jesus chooses to suffer with the harassed and oppressed.

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

¹ Ezekiel 34

² Ezekiel 34:4

We pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into that harvest, and lo and behold, Jesus summons us.

We are the answers to our prayers.

We are the laborers in the Lord's harvest.

In addition to the twelve names listed in our Gospel reading, we may add our names as well.

For we, too, are disciples transformed into apostles by Jesus' authority – by the Compassionate One's authority.

Will we do everything that the Compassionate One has spoken – has commanded us to do?

Preach the good news.

The sick – cure them.

The dead – raise them.

Those with a skin disease – cleanse them.

Demons – cast them out.

Jesus teaches us then sends us out into the Lord's plentiful harvest to labor – to work – to do the kingdom that has drawn near.

We are taught and then sent with a Jesus-given authority that acts quite differently than the authority of false shepherds.

For a Jesus-given authority is one of tender-hearted compassion – not force and harshness.

With our tender-hearted, compassionate, Jesus-given authority, we wander through a world of lost sheep howling in pain. We wander through this world proclaiming the good news through actions that resist the actions of false shepherds so howling, lost sheep may be found.

The false shepherds limit access to healthcare and cut funding for scientific research.

Those with Jesus-given authority cure the sick.

The false shepherds treat the dead as collateral damage.

Those with Jesus-given authority raise the dead.

The false shepherds deny racism's power to disease our skin.

Those with Jesus-given authority cleanse those with a skin disease.

The false shepherds use demonizing language to create enemies.

Those with Jesus-given authority cast out dignity-denying demons.

We will do everything the Lord has commanded. Everything?

The responsibility of living our apostolic authority – of living the kingdom of heaven that has drawn near – challenges us – and challenges the false shepherds.

In the verses following this morning's pericope, Jesus speaks to those challenges.

Jesus tells us that we are sheep being sent into wolves' midst.

Not everyone will welcome us or listen to the good news we proclaim and enact.

Not everyone will like us – in fact, we will be hated because of Jesus' compassion.

And when this happens, when anyone will not welcome us or listen to our words,

Jesus tells us to shake off the dust from our feet as we leave that house or town.³

A powerful reminder that we cannot micromanage how false shepherds and lost sheep respond to the good news of Jesus.

A powerful reminder that while we give compassion without payment, we also give boundaried compassion.

³ Matthew 10:14

Compassion that is clear about where we end and others begin.

Compassion that respects autonomy.⁴

Compassion that leaves the final judgment to God alone.

If false shepherds and lost sheep welcome the kingdom of heaven that has drawn near, thanks be to God.

If false shepherds and lost sheep reject this heavenly kingdom of tenderness, compassion, and restoration, we shake it off and entrust them to the Lord as we continue laboring in the harvest.

For after all, this is the Lord's harvest. We are just the laborers obeying the Compassionate One's voice.

May it be so.

Amen.

⁴ <https://brenebrown.com/art/atlas-of-the-heart-boundaries-are-a-prerequisite-for-compassion-and-empathy/>