



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

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“Send Laborers!”

Matthew 9:27-10:15

Good-bye to Bessie Eichorn; Healing Ministry

Summer is certainly here! We’ve had a tough, hot week, but it’s the kind of weather that really helps our tomatoes and zucchini grow, isn’t it? This is the time of year when—if people see you coming with tomatoes or zucchini—they start running the other way. Some people have resorted to **drive-by gifting**—going by someone’s house, leaving a bag of produce on the front steps, ringing the bell, and then zipping out of there!

You probably didn’t hear it today, but if you are around me at 10:02 some morning, you’ll hear the alarm on my watch go “beep”. Each day I turn it off, and then I pray Luke chapter 10, verse 2—“Lord, send workers into Your harvest.” And as I pray that, I think of you. Yes, you.

This morning, I want to open God’s Word with you and discover several elements of “The Jesus Method” of ministry, elements that might be helpful to get us going on the ministry God calls us to do together. Open your Bibles with me to Matthew, chapter 9, and I’ll go through another large chunk of Scripture with you, all the way through chapter 10, verse 15—a passage full of interaction of Jesus and his disciples in ministry.

There was a big difference between the disciples of Jesus and disciples of another rabbi in those days. When men wanted to study with the usual rabbi, they approached him and asked if they could study with him. Sometimes, parents would pay the rabbi to take on their son. In years of study, the student (which is how we usually translate the Greek word, *mathetes*) would memorize large portions of the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—and also memorize the interpretations of those texts that had been given by famous rabbis through the years. This would prepare them to guide the people of their town or village in questions about life that the people brought to their rabbi. But with Jesus, he did not wait to be asked by a student; he recruited. Jesus expected his disciples, as we will see today, to do something, not just know something. So when it’s JESUS’ disciples we’re talking about, it would be better to translate that word *mathetes* as “apprentice”, not “student”. The Ministry of the Kingdom of God was to be their ‘craft’. That’s why, as Christians, we are expected to do something, too, and it’s the church’s job to get us ready for Kingdom work.

I’d like to take this material in chunks, and add some notes that you can put in your Bibles. And then we’ll compare what we’ve been hearing from God this morning in His Word. Listen with me for God’s Word TO US TODAY, starting in Matthew 9:27. [text]

²⁷ As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

²⁸ When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?”

“Yes, Lord,” they replied.

²⁹ Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith will it be done to you”; ³⁰ and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, “See that no one knows about this.” ³¹ But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

³² While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. ³³ And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.”

³⁴ But the Pharisees said, “It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.”

The blind men are not as blind as others around Jesus. They called Jesus, “Son of David”. That’s a title for God’s Messiah, the Anointed One who will make things right. Just about no one around Jesus gets him yet; these “blind” guys “see” the truth about Jesus. They are speaking for God.

They cry out at the top of their lungs—it’s almost a scream. “Have mercy on us!” It is mercy, and appeal to Jesus’ compassion, that they seek.

Notice that Jesus takes them indoors, away from the crowds. This is one of those details that tells us Jesus—unlike other people going around healing in his day—was not motivated to impress a crowd with a miracle. When he does a miracle or other healing in public, he’s usually creating a demonstration of what happens when the Kingdom of God rules--his favorite subject. Jesus’ miracles are sermon illustrations. Here, however, he’s going to heal, in private, with perhaps only his disciples around.

“Do you believe I can do this?” he asks them. Hmm. There’s some sort of connection between “faith” and “miracles”, especially healings. That’s a subject for another time—we just need to notice that faith seems to be a necessary ingredient.

Their faith did not issue into obedience, however, did it? And can you blame them? Jesus has restored their sight! I cannot imagine the revolution this caused in their lives! They don’t have to be led around by relatives or friends anymore. They can have a life! And they just can’t keep this good news to themselves! Anyone who has known them will notice the difference. In no time, they’re telling everyone!

A similar thing happens with the man who can’t talk. People then assumed a person was mute because they suffered from deafness, but we know that’s not necessarily so. This guy is brought to Jesus. And this is a case of demon-possession. A spirit serving Satan has taken over this man, putting him in bondage, and limiting his capacity for a full life. Jesus drives out the demon. (Again, nothing here about “how”.) And the man speaks—perhaps he is as surprised as anyone!

Now, we get two reactions to this. The crowd is amazed—“Whoa! Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.” They are going, “Yea, Jesus!” But that’s not the only opinion. Pharisees—the serious religious folks—snort that Jesus’ power to drive out demons comes from Satan, the prince of demons.

According to Mark 3:29 or Matthew 9:3 , these guys have just committed the unforgivable sin. They deny that Jesus is who he says he is, and believe instead that Jesus serves the devil, “d’ evil one”. If Jesus is the only way to God, and if the Pharisees don’t believe that, they are truly lost.

Now, what do you get from this first part? Does, “You can’t please everyone all the time” fit? People who do things only God can do—even THEY will get criticized. And we who follow Jesus are preparing to do things only God can do. We need to know that not everyone will like it, that people will make up stories about us and try to undermine us. We can expect this. But we can also expect God will use us as we devote ourselves to God’s ministry.

Let’s take the next chunk. ³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

The big word in this paragraph is “compassion”. Jesus feels with the people. He gets that they are confused, conflicted, and full of needs. That compassion is what motivates him, not personal gain. And compassion is what has to motivate us as we do ministry in His Name.
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Jesus looked at all that need, and it was almost overwhelming to him. Through meeting needs, he knew he could draw more and more people into God’s Kingdom harvest. But he was only one man. He could not do that alone. He needs help. (Kinda like Patty Markham with Vacation Bible School!) Jesus tells us, “Ask God.” “Beg God for helpers, for workers!” Remember this one!

Next section: Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Jesus has authority over disease and evil spirits, as we have just seen. He can give that authority to anyone he chooses. Indeed, he gives it to all his disciples, and any today who would be his apprentices in Kingdom work. We offer our healing ministry today based on this and the disciples’ commissioning at the end of the gospel accounts, and also in Acts Chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit comes to give that power. It’s God’s power. We are doing what Jesus did. We are doing it in His Name and in His presence, because Jesus is here, now. If we don’t believe that, feel that, act in that spirit, then it’s just a show, and not much to show for it.

Jesus tells his apprentices to beg God for workers. He has recruited these men. They are going to become part of the answer to their own prayer!

Next section: ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.

This is the disciples’ first mission. Jesus wants to start with bringing the Kingdom of God to God’s people, Israel. But notice, Jesus says, “find the lost sheep among the Israelites”. This is an important detail. People who have no need—no need for help, no need for hope, no need for God—are basically a waste of ministry time. Start with people who are most like you, Jesus says. For his first apprentices, that would be fellow Israelites. Seek and find the ones with clear needs. These are the people who should get your ministry.

Jesus tells his disciples to preach first, minister next—just as he has been doing. Remember, the miracles were really demonstrations of the Kingdom. It’s connecting people personally with God that is the point, not merely making people physically well. So that preaching-and-heal order is important. We might say something like this: “God loves you. God has sent me to heal, or to meet this other need.” And then, do all you can and use the God-sized authority Jesus gave you for ministry for all that you know you cannot do.

Heal the sick. That’s clear. Could “raise the dead” mean, “lead people from death without Jesus, to life with Jesus?” “Cleanse those who have leprosy”—touch the untouchable. And take the authority Christ has given you over devilish spirits, to bring sanity and peace. Tall orders! But we have a huge God!

Next: “Freely you have received, freely give. ⁹ Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; ¹⁰ take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.”

I’d paraphrase that as, give up being self-sufficient. Being self-sufficient shows how little you trust God. Let yourself depend on others to meet YOUR needs, even for the basics of food, clothing and shelter.

For many of us, this is the hardest thing of all—giving up control, going into new territory with no “back up” of our own. The opposite of faith is fear, so it’s helpful to get in touch with the fears that might hold us back. Would we be afraid that people would think we’re bums, by not meeting our own needs? Wouldn’t that be embarrassing? Would people turn us down, reminding us of all the times when we were kids that not chosen for the team, or left out of something good?

Ok, now will we trust God is more powerful than what we fear?

It’s a choice, isn’t it—our choice. Will we trust God? That’s the most basic faith question of all.

The next section somewhat continues this theme: ¹¹ “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. ¹² As

you enter the home, give it your greeting. ¹³ If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. (NIV)

Jesus here gives his apprentices some orders that are really helpful in dealing with our fears. Come to the next town, he says. Ask around for who in that town has a good reputation. Connect with that person. Be a blessing for him. And if you speak a prayer of blessing on them and they reject you, just move on. It's on them; it's not your problem. Move on.

But when you find a “deserving” home—and you will—bless those people fully. That's your sign that these are the people to whom God has sent you.

This, then, is “The Jesus Method” for ministry. That's what we are to do. We don't have to go “on the road” to distant towns and villages, but we are to GO, not sit in our holy huddles with our church friends. The Christian faith is only one generation away from extinction. Whether you “GO” or “sit at home” is the difference. Jesus told us to “Beg God to send workers.” I am looking at those harvest workers, beginning with our elders, with whom I am working to get them ready for ministry.

With the elders, we are working right now on faith, and then I will take them to start connecting with people not yet part of God's Kingdom. First, we will pray, asking God for workers—may WE be those workers this day! We'll stir up our compassion for the people God will send our way. Then we'll go meet some, doing what Jesus did.

At first, the elders will watch me; and sometimes I will fail. We will talk about that. Then, they will do it with me, and we'll discuss that. Then, they'll take the lead with me there. (And again, we'll talk that through after the fact.) And then—they'll be on their own as pairs, and I'll be there when it's time to process that together. I'll support their ministries.

The connection with God—faith—comes first. I want each one to develop their ability to sense God's leading when they're “on the field”. Then we engage in Kingdom ministry together.

And then, the elders will apprentice some of you for Kingdom ministry. You're not going to be full-time evangelists, but as you beg God for workers, and as you experience how many people around us are hungry for God, you'll at least be ready when God sends someone across your path with a need for God.

The Jesus Method for Ministry. Beg God for workers, out of compassion. Become those workers! Proclaim the Kingdom. Heal the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchable. Drive out demons and restore order in people's lives.

The Kingdom of God looks like that, as it is breaking into our time, more and more. This is what happens when God's will is done “on earth as it is in heaven.” And we get to be part of what God is doing. Yes, you! Yes, me! Together!

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on July 13, 2008, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]