

SERMON 11TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Dressed in wide-brimmed black hats, six-button coats and carrying their belongings over their shoulders on a stick, several hundred German trainees still embark annually on the “Walz” and wander the country for a year and a day. The Walz is the culmination of a traditional apprenticeship in one of 35 crafts, from carpentry to roofing, and provides the opportunity to learn regional variations and to enter a guild.

While all apprenticeships in Germany trace their roots to this pre-industrial rite of passage, demand for modern vocational education is high after a series of reforms over the past 40 years created pathways for trainees to earn higher qualifications equivalent to their academic peers. The qualification of master (Meister) for electricians or

plumbers. I have always been fascinated with the idea of the journeyman. The one who sits under the master and learns his trade. It goes back centuries.

The whole idea of a journeyman is that it enables the apprentice to make mistakes and learn from them. Without this process one does not become a master. The same is true of Jesus and his disciples. He didn't stop them making mistakes or disappointing the group, he allowed them to learn from it.

Just look at the makeup of the twelve: the "first" apostle Peter will deny the Lord three times and the last apostle Judas will betray him to death, while two apostles in between held opposite positions on the Roman occupation (tax collector Matthew worked for them, while Simon the Cananaean or "zealot" worked against them). And yet the passage

ends where it begins, but this time with these apostles now entrusted with Jesus' work of proclamation and healing.

The list of orders given to the apostles in today's Gospel could double for Jesus' own resume: "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." Jesus not only sends them out with power to authenticate the kingdom's nearness but to announce it by using the very same words as their teacher: "The kingdom of heaven has come near" We are expected to resemble him in word and deed. To be sent by Jesus is, in some sense, to be sent as Jesus.

Naturally, we may bristle at such a thought, ever sensitive to the dangers of savior-complexes and self-aggrandizement that we now see play out in our modern politics. Nevertheless, Matthew does

not hold back from reminding us that master and apprentice, while clearly distinct in their roles, inevitably bear a resemblance to one another. In fact, a good teacher should be recognizable in their student as much as a master craftsman's craft is evident in the work of an apprentice. As Jesus makes clear a bit later: "it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master".

And here we have all of Jesus' apprentices named. Sometimes lost in the comparisons and contrasts between the lists of apostles the fact that the naming scenes occur in quite different settings. After receiving their apostolic commission in Mark's Gospel, it says quite unremarkably that "Jesus went home". Luke's Gospel's appointments of the apostles has a bit more detail. Jesus spends a whole night in prayer, yet immediately after they are named Jesus accompanies them down the mountain to begin his "sermon on the plain". The actual sending of the "twelve" in Luke comes later.

With Matthew's Gospel, we encounter something altogether different. Jesus seems to be in the thick of fulfilling his Father's mission—preaching, teaching, healing—when he inducts his

disciples into the same vocation. While the narrator's word about Jesus' compassion for his sheep reminds us of the foundation of Jesus' mission, his commission introduces a different image: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest". Paired with Jesus' compassion is a sense of urgency. The time is ripe for their mission, so he summons them and gives them "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness".

The language is striking because it is a near mirror image of the words used to describe Jesus' own practice in: "Jesus went about all the cities and

villages, teaching ... and proclaiming ... and curing every disease and every sickness." At this moment the narrator introduces the twelve by name. In other words, the list of names does not stand alone as a mere registry of the twelve but as an introduction to an apostleship "charter." And so we too are called to this idea of apostleship. We are sent wherever we may be to proclaim the Gospel. We in fact make Jesus present.

Yet I know we often feel like we are not smarter enough, or well-read enough or even confident enough to share our message of hope with others. Or perhaps like the disciples we feel we have made mistakes.

And yet, with a promise anticipating the very end of the gospel, Jesus reminds his followers "do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say ... for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you"

In the very midst of trouble those obedient to Jesus' mission will be equipped and empowered with God's own presence. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age"

To participate in the proclamation and healing characteristic of Jesus' own mission is to get caught up in the very life of God's Son given to the world.

As we gather back today after such a long absence to share Eucharist together, in some sense the world has changed. We now take hygiene more seriously, we are mindful of the fragility of the human race. But there will also be some good things to surface I'm sure. I think it has made a lot of people aware of the precariousness of life, the importance of family, and the importance of community. We as a community of faith have a new opportunity to share the good news that Christ has conquered death and now empowers us with his spirit. And Jesus as always is our guide.

For If, with this passage, we see Jesus in the midst of training disciples for mission, by Gospel's end the scene will have

shifted. The instructions on how to be a disciple in mission will, with the backing of the Risen Lord, become instructions on how to make disciples in mission. That is what we are called to do, to the glory of God.

Amen.