

*Celebrating the Living Word*  
*Matthew 10*

*When does Pentecost happen in Matthew? Or, when do the disciples receive the Spirit?*

Actually, the Spirit coming and filling the disciples isn't part of Matthew's story. But here in chapter 10, early in his ministry, Jesus is sending his disciples out. And they're filled with the Spirit: "for it is not you who speak, *but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you*" (20).

Isn't that interesting?! In the story about Jesus that Matthew is telling, the Spirit of God is already inhabiting the disciples. He didn't have to die first. Or be resurrected or ascend into heaven. Rather, Jesus simply declares the presence of the Spirit. And sends them.

This sending out of his disciples happens early in Jesus' ministry, and right after Matthew, the tax collector, has been called to be the 12<sup>th</sup> disciple. So the only instruction these disciples had was the Sermon on the Mount. And being with Jesus as he touched bodies—healing, forgiving, raising from the dead—for two chapters.

And that's it. They're ready to be sent to do the very same things that Jesus did!

The lectionary text for today is only the last three verses of this chapter. But I think we have to look at the whole chapter in order to hear these verses. The beginning of the chapter is reflected in the ending, a chiasmic structure, or perhaps a kind of circle...the ending returning to the beginning. And the beginning and ending of this missional chapter is about *welcome*.

In v 5, Jesus sends out the 12 with basic instructions about where to go and what to do: they're not to go to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans, only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And what they're to do is "proclaim the good news," and "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." All easy stuff, right?! But that isn't all. Jesus also has instructions for how to go: they're to go having divested themselves of all material goods and wealth.

Now...usually when I get to this point I'm shaking my head. "This isn't going to happen. It's too hard. And frankly, I'm not sure I want to." But this time, starting with the end of the chapter, I had new eyes to see the beginning. Jesus is sending out the disciples and the disciples are to be looking for places of welcome. Jesus doesn't give them instructions for how to touch and heal and raise bodies from the dead. Instead, he instructs them about finding places of welcome. He's sending them out to look for villages and homes where they will be received and offered hospitality. And if there's no welcome in particular places, Jesus tells them to move on and not waste their time.

The priority of their mission is to find welcome. To be received. And by the time we get to the end of the chapter, Jesus is no longer talking about the disciples being welcomed, he's talking about how they're to *be* welcoming. The mission of Jesus is hospitality, about receiving people.

Inside the circle of teachings about welcome, Jesus creates another circle about relationships. He begins by warning them that the journey won't be easy. His warning describes his own trial and death:

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves.... Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings.... When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.<sup>21</sup> Brother will betray brother to death....

Later, Jesus returns to relationships, closing the circle as he prepares them for his sending:

Don't think that I have come to bring peace...I've come to bring a sword.... I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother.... Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

What does this have to do with mission and hospitality? There's something about this mission of Jesus, the hospitality that Jesus is teaching to us...there's something about being welcomed and welcoming that demands detachment. To be a disciple of Jesus, to be ready to

receive hospitality and to offer hospitality, we must be divested, not only of material goods and wealth, but also of relationships. But it isn't so much about relationships as it is being detached from their identities, from the security of their genealogies. Being divested of all the ways they and we are used to identifying ourselves. Being detached from our lives.

What is so threatening about welcome? What kind of welcome is Jesus talking about that risks betrayal and murder?

Matthew's Gospel is directed to the house of Israel. But surely it is right for us to hear it directed to our context. Jesus sends the disciples out as disciples. They won't be able to buy their way into people's homes. They won't be able to coerce hospitality. All they have is their person, their bodies, their beings. That's vulnerable. In countless ways, when I meet someone, I am judging the body in front of me. I am weighing my response, deciding my welcome, based on what the person is wearing, how they look, who they're related to, what their job is. And on and on.

The disciples are being sent without their family trees, without their family inheritance. But they aren't going without family or without an inheritance! They're being sent as beloved children of God. They're being sent filled with the Spirit of God. They're being sent with full access to their eternal inheritance. Jesus has given them access.

Jesus is doing something very subtle here. He's blurring and even erasing the lines and definitions that keep people from receiving each other. We human beings want our labels and identities and lines and definitions. They create order and hold our worlds in place. And they give us the illusion that we are separate. When the truth is that we are the same. .

Here Jesus is responding to those lines that we draw around ourselves and around each. And he's saying, "No. No, we are each other." Jesus is sending the disciples, he isn't going with them. And yet he says, "The person who welcomes you is welcoming me and welcoming Abba God.

There is no space or division between you and me. There is no space between you and God. We are one.”

In between these hard, cryptic lines and sayings of Jesus we come to the end of this chapter and hear with clarity the simplicity and smallness of Jesus’ mission: a cup of cold water to the least. The goal of Jesus mission isn’t to eradicate sickness and death—the point of being sent is to be received and to receive. Of being received *as I am* and receiving you *as you are*. There is no person beneath our welcome, no body outside our reception. And there is no gesture of welcome and reception too small or insignificant. Because it is always Jesus that we are meeting.

The mission is small and it sounds too easy. We’d rather focus on curing the sick and raising the dead. But when we’re focused on fixing problems...especially someone else’s problems...we don’t have to do the hard work of hospitality and relationships. Healing and cleansing and new life aren’t what we do; they’re the work of the Spirit, an outcome of hospitality.

I’ve been thinking about Keith’s sermon last Sunday about human arrogance. And it occurs to me that much of Jesus’ instruction in this chapter is about how we divest ourselves of our arrogance so that we’re able to give and receive hospitality—in every gesture, in every act, with every body. When we’re divested of our arrogance, we’re free to trust the Spirit of God that is already inhabiting us, and inhabiting all others. We don’t have to know or figure out how the sick will be cured and the dead will be raised, we can trust the Spirit to know. It is our work to trust the Spirit. (She has a much better view and understanding than we do!) Our work is to keep opening the spaces that separate bodies...to keep opening myself, un hiding myself...so that I can give myself to others without fear and receive others with abandon.

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me...and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”