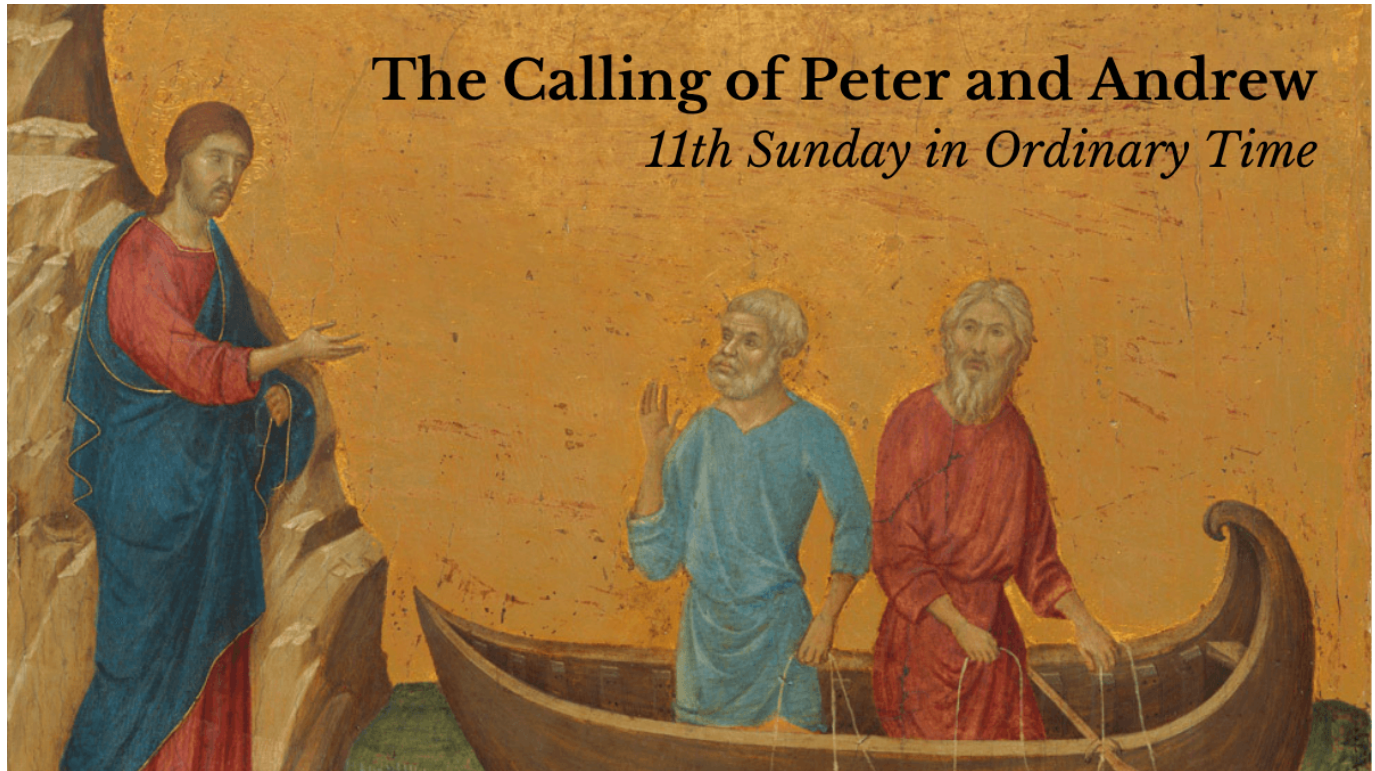


## 11th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A



### Matthew 9:36–10:8

<sup>9:36</sup> At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.” <sup>10:1</sup> Then he summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness. <sup>2</sup> The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him. <sup>5</sup> Jesus sent out these twelve after instructing them thus, “Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. <sup>6</sup> Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ <sup>8</sup> Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.

This Sunday (2023) we return to Ordinary Time in the liturgical sense. Ordinary Time includes the days not part of the Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter seasons. The Easter season extends to and includes Pentecost Sunday. Ordinary Time starts the Monday following Pentecost. Apart from special feast days and memorials, the liturgical color is green, but you may have noticed the two Sundays following Pentecost used white as the liturgical colors. Still, the Solemnity of Holy Trinity (9th week) and Corpus Christi (10th week) are part of Ordinary Time.

Did you know that the word "ordinary" as used here comes from the ordinal numerals by which the weeks are identified or counted. The weekly count moves from the 1st week of Ordinary Time in January (typically the Baptism of the Lord) to the 34th week that begins toward the end of November. In 2023 we celebrated the 7th Sunday of Ordinary Time just before Ash Wednesday, the week following Pentecost

was the 8th Week of Ordinary Time. The 9th and 10th Sundays were noted above - and that brings us to the 11th Sunday.

Will this always be the same each year? Nope. It all depends on when Easter is celebrated which in turn affects the date of Ash Wednesday, which always falls 46 days before Easter Sunday. The earliest Ash Wednesday can be celebrated is February 4th. Of course that last happened in 1818 and won't happen again until the year 2285. The latest Ash Wednesday can be celebrated is March 10th, but it has to be in a Leap Year with other factors falling into place and that won't happen again until 2096.

For the record, the last Sunday of Ordinary Time is the Solemnity of Christ the King. And since we are on the topic, the liturgical year can have either 33 or 34 weeks of Ordinary Time. How that shifts is too long to explain, but here is an easy way to remember. If the following liturgical year starts in November, the previous liturgical year's Ordinary Time will have 33 weeks. If the following liturgical year starts in December, the previous liturgical year's Ordinary Time will have 34 weeks.

### **The Galilee Mission**

The gospel is taken from Matthew 9:36 - 10:8 which falls in a section that is part of the Galilee ministry, but towards the end with a third cycle of Jesus' mighty acts (9:18–34) which reveals his power over death and chronic illness, blindness, and speechlessness. The Galilee ministry ends with essentially a summary verse: "*Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness.*" (Mt 9:35, a virtual repeat of Mt 4:23)

It is from this summary verse that we see the connection between discipleship and mission:

*At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."* (vv. 36-38)

The connection is made clear in that both endeavors, shepherding and harvest, need workers to bring the endeavor to its completion. God is the ultimate shepherd and harvest master, but he needs the cooperation of those who accept Jesus' invitation to discipleship. The three sections on discipleship in chapters 8–9 emphasize the radical demands that it can involve, the fact that all kinds of people can be called to it and the radical newness that it represents, and its missionary dimension (9:35–38). The final verses of Matthew 9 serve as the prologue for the great Missionary Discourse (Mt 10:1-42).

The disciples' mission is limited to the people of Israel (vv. 5b–6), and they are to avoid entering the cities of non-Jews and Samaritans (whose Judaism was suspect in the eyes of Judeans and Galileans). Only after the death and resurrection of Jesus does the mission to the latter groups begin (see 28:19). The disciples' mission replicates and extends the mission of Jesus in preaching the coming of God's kingdom and in healing the sick. As discipleship has been offered to them as a gift, so they are to offer it to others.

Wandering preachers representing various philosophies and religions were a common sight in the world of Jesus' time. Jesus' disciples are instructed not to be anxious about money or baggage or lodging, but rather to depend on the charity of their hearers (vv. 9–13). Their lack of concern for money, clothing, and lodging allows them to carry out the mission in a more single-minded way. It also bears witness to their trust in God's care for them and to their conviction that what has been freely received should be freely given.

### **The Apostles**

From the first verses one should notice a change in vocabulary as Jesus "*summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness.*"

*The names of the twelve apostles...*” (Mt 10:1-2) Up until this point those who follow Jesus have been referred to as “disciples.”

The term “disciple” generally refers to a follower or student of a teacher. In the context of the Gospel of Matthew, it primarily refers to those who followed Jesus during his earthly ministry, learning from his teachings and observing his actions. The disciples were individuals who chose to follow Jesus, committing themselves to his teachings and the way of life he exemplified. They were his close companions, accompanying him on his journeys, witnessing his miracles, and receiving personal instruction from him.

The term “apostle” specifically refers to a subset of disciples who were appointed by Jesus for a specific mission. The word apostle comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means “one who is sent out.” In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus chooses twelve of his disciples and designates them as apostles. The names of the twelve apostles are listed: Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John (the sons of Zebedee), Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed Jesus). While all apostles were disciples, not all disciples were apostles. The apostles had a unique commission to continue the work of Jesus after his departure, spreading the good news, establishing the church, and teaching others to observe all that Jesus had commanded them (Matthew 28:19-20).

This is the only time Matthew uses the word “apostle.” In the remainder of the gospel they are indicated by context or are referred to as “the Twelve.” R.T. France [2007, 375] notes: “It is surprising that Matthew does not use again what must have been, by the time he wrote his gospel, a familiar title for this inner group, but perhaps this indicates his awareness of a difference in function between the ‘apostles’ as church leaders in his day and the role of the Twelve as companions of Jesus during his ministry.”

Note that this is not an account of their “calling” as a group of 12. As individuals they had already been called, but even here they seem to be an already established group as they are “*summoned*.” The Gospels of Mark and Luke also list the apostles. With the exception of Thaddeus, the names are the same in all these lists, though the order of the names and the descriptions of the individuals vary a little. Scholars have noted that Matthew’s list has two distinctive features: it is arranged in pairs (perhaps reflecting the tradition that they were sent out in pairs and Simon (Peter), who comes first in all the lists and whose leading role among the twelve is clear in all the gospels, is explicitly designated in Matthew as “first,” even though no further numbering follows for the remainder of the names.

France [2007, 376] notes:

Jesus’ choice of twelve as the number of his inner circle has, and must surely have had at the time, obvious symbolic importance as the number of the sons of Jacob and thus of the tribes of Israel. People might have remembered Moses’ choice of twelve tribal leaders in Num 1:1–16, and it is even possible that Matthew’s phrase “These are the names of ...” is a deliberate echo of Num 1:4, “These are the names of the men who shall assist you.” The symbolism will become explicit in 19:28, where these twelve disciples are given an eschatological role when, alongside the Son of Man seated on his own glorious throne, they too “will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” There is no reason to believe that these twelve Galilean men were in fact drawn from all twelve traditional tribes; their significance was in their number, not in their ancestry. When one of the Twelve was lost (note the emphatic “the eleven disciples” in 28:16, after Judas’ death), the number was sufficiently important for him to need to be replaced (Acts 1:15–26), though even before that Paul continues to refer to them as “the Twelve” (1 Cor 15:5). So from an early point in his ministry Jesus was

apparently thinking in terms of an alternative “Israel” with its own leadership based now not on tribal origin but on the Messiah’s call.

### **The Commission**

The commission of the Twelve is spelled out in strictly functional terms as an extension of Jesus’ mission described in Mt 8 and 9. Note that the commission and its terms are also found in Mark 6:7–11; Luke 9:1–5; 10:1–12.

*Jesus sent out these twelve after instructing them thus, “Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. (Mt 10:5-8)*

The text of the commissioning covers three aspects of their mission: to whom they are to go (vv. 5–6); the nature of their mission in both word and deed (vv. 7–8); and although not part of our gospel the natural boundaries of Matthew’s pericope (a set of verses that forms one coherent unit or thought) extend to v.15 and includes the familiar:

*Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick. The laborer deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, look for a worthy person in it, and stay there until you leave. As you enter a house, wish it peace. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if not, let your peace return to you. Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words—go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Amen, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. (Matthew 10:9–15)*

Many people note that the commission is given with geographical boundaries established: “*Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” How does this make sense in the final mission statement in Mt 28:19, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*”? There is an argument to be made that Jesus’ mission and the commissioning of the Twelve was to engage the God’s people Israel to be the light to all the nations - the work for which they were commissioned. By Mt 28, Jesus has been firmly rejected as Messiah, but the larger mission of drawing in all the nations remains. In this God’s people Israel are replaced by the Twelve.

### **To the lost sheep**

R.T France [2007, 381] notes: “Jesus is the Messiah of God’s people Israel (Mt 2:6), coming in fulfillment of Israel’s scriptures (as we have seen repeatedly in chs. 1–2 and since) to save “his people” from their sins (1:21). So it is at first sight not surprising that it is specifically to Israel that his disciples are also sent. That will be more than enough to keep them busy until “the Son of Man comes.”

As the Twelve continue to journey with Jesus, there will be encounters with non-Israelites, for example,

- The encounter with the Canaanite woman in Mt 15
- Responding to a Roman soldier in Mt 8
- Delivering a Gentile demoniac also in Mt 8 while clearly in non-Jewish territory on the other side of the Sea of Galilee

But then again Jesus can certainly define his own area of mission nonetheless Jesus’ own response to the faith of the Canaanite woman and Roman soldier are a foreshadowing of a salvation other than an exclusively Jewish presence in the kingdom of heaven.

It is also noteworthy that Galilee is completely surrounded by gentile territory except to the south, but then that is Samaria. The mission is effectively restricted to Galilee, but even then in the mixed society of Galilee there would inevitably be some earlier contact with Gentiles

### **The Mission**

Having looked at the commission, let us now turn to the two simple verses that provide the framework for the mission itself: “*As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.*” (Mt 10:7-8)

This is not the first place in Matthew’s gospel in which the proclamation “*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” has been heard. Consider John the Baptist: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” (Mt 3:2) While “repent” is not specifically included in Mt 10, it is not hard to imagine that it is now a given part of the proclamation given Jesus exactly repeats (4:17) the Baptist’s words. The theme of “repentance” reaches back to the OT prophets who called on God’s people to “return” to their true allegiance. Our modern language would call it “conversion.” What is different is that now there is a new note of urgency, of a “now or never” opportunity because the kingdom of heaven has arrived in the person of Jesus.

The proclamation is to be accompanied by actions corresponding to Jesus’ own miraculous activity. As R.T. France [2007, 383] notes “four acts of deliverance specified are carefully worded to reflect the miracles in chs. 8–9 ... Their mission is an extension of his, and ... what he could do they are given the power to do too. Healing through divine power... was widely regarded as an appropriate activity of holy men, and even exorcism was an accepted part of the Jewish scene... Given Jesus’ wide reputation already for such supernatural acts, people would have expected his representatives to do likewise ... But within this list the unobtrusive inclusion of “raise the dead” is remarkable. Its very matter-of-fact tone raises the stakes significantly. Only two great men of the past were credited with such a feat (Elijah, 1 Kgs 17:17–24; Elisha, 2 Kgs 4:32–37; cf. 13:21), and Jesus’ resuscitation of the official’s daughter has introduced a new element into the demonstration of the Messiah’s authority... We have no record that the disciples did in fact “raise the dead” during Jesus’ lifetime, though subsequent miracles of Peter (Acts 9:36–42) and Paul (Acts 20:9–12) would no doubt be taken as a fulfilling of this charge.”

The final verse, “*Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.*” does not need a great explanation. What the Twelve have received is all gift and they are to give freely what they have freely received.

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Sources:

R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*. Part of The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007)