

“Called and Sent”

“And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction...These twelve Jesus sent out” (Matthew 10:1, 5).

I love the movie “Hoosiers.” For an Indiana high school basketball fan who grew up in the 80’s, there’s never been a better sports movie. And yet, there’s one scene in this film that baffles me. With the state championship on the line, and the score tied at 40, Hickory coach, Norman Dale calls a timeout with 19 seconds left in the game. With stakes that couldn’t be higher, Coach Dale does something utterly shocking. He draws up a play to use Hickory star Jimmy Chitwood as a decoy instead of entrusting him with the last shot. As the coach lays out his plan for the final play, the players stare in disbelief at Coach Dale’s horrible idea until he finally reverses course and tells them to get the ball to Jimmy and get out of his way. This, of course, leads to Jimmy Chitwood’s last-second shot and the greatest victory in the history of Indiana basketball.

As today’s Gospel lesson opens, Jesus was unequivocally the star of the team. He’d taught the crowds and cast out demons, He’d healed the sick and even raised a girl from the dead. His reputation had grown throughout the land, He had done all things well, and yet, in today’s reading, He does something utterly shocking. As the text opens we are told that Jesus calls His twelve disciples to him and sends them out with “authority over unclean spirits...and to heal every disease and every affliction...” and to proclaim that, “the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:1, 7).

It’s like Coach Dale asking Buddy Walker to take the last shot of the state championship game. Here. Jesus sends these twelve unqualified and overmatched disciples out on their own to do impossible things. And if this charge wasn’t daunting enough, Jesus then describes the implications of His commission. He tells them exactly what they will face as they carry out the work of the Kingdom, and instead of filling their heads with images of glory, the picture He paints is not pretty. “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and...” Jesus says, “...you will be hated by all for my name’s sake” (Matthew 10:21-22).

What a pep talk! Up to this point, the disciples had probably loved their role. Basking in the popularity of their miracle-working rabbi they’d almost certainly attained their own degree of celebrity, but suddenly everything seems to have changed and Jesus appears to be handing his ministry over to these ill-suited and underwhelming groupies, and they must have been terrified. In this text, Jesus calls these twelve men to impossible action requiring a bold faith, and this call presented His disciples with a huge problem because – on their own – they didn’t have a bold faith.

These disciples were simple men called out of an ordinary existence. They were not wealthy. They held no influence or power. Most of them were uneducated fishermen, and although they had followed Jesus for some time, these men weren’t even a shadow of the Pentecost Apostles who would eventually lead the early Church. In fact, this group of disciples contained men who would ultimately betray Jesus, and flee in terror when He was arrested, and deny him repeatedly. And yet, it’s into the hands of these deeply flawed followers that Jesus entrusts His ministry.

Yet, as crazy as this call may seem, this account from Matthew’s Gospel provides an important lesson for us today, because you see, we are also deeply flawed followers. And when it comes to faith we are not naturally bold. In fact, we shrink back from sharing Scripture, and we’re embarrassed to pray in public. We sit on our hands when we’re approached with a new opportunity for ministry, and instead of freely

giving as Jesus instructs us, we bury our talents, we hoard our time, and we hide our treasures. We justify our inaction, we minimize our responsibility for our neighbor, and in the end, we put our trust in our own good planning rather than in the promises of God. We are unqualified, ill-suited, and overmatched for the call of Christ...and yet we are the very people Jesus sends.

Today, God calls sinners like you and me, not because of any extraordinary spiritual gift we possess – we don't! Today, God calls sinners like you and me, not because we have shown that we are worthy for service in His Kingdom – we aren't! Today, God calls sinners like you and me, not because we have earned the right to represent Him – we haven't! Today, God calls sinners like you and me because of an unconditional and unbridled love that sent His Son to earth and carried Him to the Cross to be punished for sinners like you and me, and in this utterly shocking act of love you have been redeemed. You have been reconciled to God. And through the forgiveness won for world on the Cross of Jesus Christ, you have been given a new life, a fresh hope, and a bold faith to trust in and act on the promises of our Creator and Savior and King! Brothers and sisters, today Christ draws us out of our apathy, and He pulls us from the gutter of guilt, And He proclaims His forgiveness, He points us to heaven, and today, our Savior gives us a life-giving promise that changes the heart and empowers us with a boldness that comes from the outside in.

You see, faith is never based on us. It doesn't reflect the strength of our will or the sincerity of our heart. No. Faith is founded and grounded in the Christ, and this bold faith is a gift that can only come from the Holy Spirit and it is given to us completely by grace. It is a result of God's love, it is given for God's purposes, and it is a created reality that we see spelled out in Scripture again and again.

Paul encouraged his young friend Timothy by saying, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power...So do not be ashamed of our Lord...who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace" (I Timothy 1:7-9). And to the Corinthians Paul wrote, "Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold... And...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (II Corinthians 3:12, 18).

And the mind-blowing, earth-shaking implication of this promise is that just as He did with His disciples, Christ has also given us the authority to serve in His Kingdom. This means that the very same God who spoke the world into being, and controls every sparrow in the sky, and numbers every hair on your head will give you exactly what you need to accomplish the impossible work to which He has called you. This is God's promise. And this God's work. And it will not fail!

Christ Jesus has redeemed you and He's given you the power to boldly live out your faith. This means that you can step out in ways that will not always be comfortable, and it means that you can reconcile broken relationships that seem beyond repair. It means that you can sacrifice of yourself to the meet the needs of another, and it means that you can speak the message of Christ in the daylight and proclaim God's love from rooftops. It means that we can all be the people God has called us to be!

Today, Jesus does something utterly shocking. With eternal stakes that couldn't be any higher, He calls us and sends us to do the work of His Kingdom. And no matter how unqualified or ill-prepared you may be, He has washed you with His blood, He has cleansed you from your sin, and He has filled you with the power of His Holy Spirit, and He has sent you to deliver a message of forgiveness that will save the world. Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today; in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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