

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, July 2, 2017

Said Mass

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year A, Proper 8: Isaiah 2:10–17; Psalm 89:1–8, 89:1–4, 15–18; Romans 6:3–11; Matthew 10:34–42*

In Matthew, when Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, the longest and best known of the five sermons Matthew’s Jesus gives, the evangelist tells us that Jesus “went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity.”¹

While Jesus is doing this, he “saw the crowds . . . they were . . . like sheep without a shepherd.”² Then Jesus, “the Lord of the harvest” sends out “laborers into his harvest.”³ He appoints twelve apostles. The second of the five sermons in Matthew is for these twelve. He tells them that their ministry will be an itinerant one, that is, they are to be on the move, going from place to place. They are to be poor and possess nothing but the clothes on their backs—no money, no sandals, no

¹ Matthew 9:35.

² Matthew 9:36.

³ Matthew 9:37–38.

staff. He tells them, “You received without paying, give without pay.”⁴

This is a ministry to the house of Israel only. He tells the apostles and all of his disciples that they will suffer for proclaiming the kingdom. But none of them is to be afraid. Today’s gospel lesson is the conclusion of that sermon.

Dr. Mark Davis in his Scripture blog points out that the Greek at the beginning of the lesson is not, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth.” Jesus isn’t issuing a command for them to shut down their brains—“do not think.” A better translation would be, “May you not have the opinion that I came to cast peace on the earth.”⁵ Jesus prepares his apostles for the reality of the suffering, brutality, and loss that they will face.” Jesus’ disciples are not just following orders. They have choices about what they believe and what they do.

Jesus is also speaking about how the Lord will bless other disciples, who are not apostles, who receive and

⁴ Matthew 10:8.

⁵ <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2014/06/a-difficult-text-for-difficult-crises.html> (Accessed 24 June 2017).

care for those who preach, who evangelize, will not lose their reward in heaven.

I want to say a few words about one verse in particular from today's gospel. Jesus said, "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me."⁶ I think you and I can hear these words in the background of the great judgment in Matthew, when the king separates the sheep from the goats, and says, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."⁷

I wrote in this week's newsletter about an article I came across while working on this gospel lesson, "The Real Absence: A Note on the Eucharist" by Canon Donald Gray, a retired and distinguished senior priest of the Church of England.⁸ Gray was suggesting that in the Eucharist, and I would add, our lives, Jesus is really present and really absent. I like the way Gray

⁶ Matthew 10:40.

⁷ Matthew 25:35–36.

⁸ Donald P. Gray, "The Real Absence: A Note on the Eucharist," (*Worship* 44 [January 1970], 20–26).

understands how this duality shapes our worship—and, again I would add, our lives. Because through the Spirit Jesus is present now, we live not for the future, but from the future, when we will be completely present to the Lord and the Lord will be completely present to us. Jesus gives his grace and life to us so that we can be his sisters and brothers, the children, the people, of God.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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