

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 4
Saturday, July 2, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, July 3, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.

“The Harvest is Plentiful”

Luke 10:1-20

Last Sunday, I along with others from our Lutheran Church community witnessed the ordination of Pastor Ian Heinze over at St. James. It was a beautiful service. Our Gospel reading, the sending out of the 72 is a prominent text in the Rite of Ordination. There are a couple stark realities which are put forth in this text. One, there is a great need for pastors (laborers in the harvest field). Also, there is great blessing in interacting and proclaiming the Gospel to the “sons of peace,” as Jesus describes the faithful. And also, there are those who will reject that peace.

Looking upon the landscape of history and humanity, we see that Christ and His message of forgiveness have always been despised and rejected by the majority in this world. The people of God, the “sons of peace,” have repeatedly been referred to as “the faithful remnant.” Unfortunately, that is just the way it has always been.

But that doesn’t mean it’s OK that masses go on wallowing in their unbelief or apathy toward God. I mentioned last Sunday that a new word has come into the theological lexicon: “Apatheism.” Apatheism toward God and the church is on

the rise much more than crass atheism. Here in Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells us that "The harvest is plentiful." It is the workers that are few. And this reference is specifically focused on those who are deliberately sent out as pastors or missionaries. And we pray to the Lord to call those who will go out and proclaim.

But we also pray to the Lord to give each and everyone here the strength to be a witness locally. Before you book passage on your journey to the jungles of Papua New Guinea, have some meaningful conversations with your friends and family whose baptismal faith has been pushed aside to where the Gospel has become a lower priority. I will argue that apathy, rather than outright unbelief is the more problematic issue for the church – at least as far as I see it. (Although a pretty strong case could be made that apathy equals unbelief.)

As God's people, we are faced with serious questions about how to best go about proclaiming the joy of the Gospel and the truth of God's Word. This is something Jesus had to teach His disciples. There are many theories out there as to what is the best practice. This question is debated at seminaries and within churches all the time: What is the best way to reach those who are not here to receive God's gifts of Word and Sacrament?

How should you, and how many times should you confront your friends, neighbors, or loved ones concerning their apathy, lack of faith, or their sinful lifestyle? When does speaking to them about their lack of relationship with their Lord become no longer profitable for them or you?

Unfortunately, there is no clear answer. In the parable of the Lost Sheep,

Jesus says to leave the 99 and focus all of your energy and attention on finding the one lost sheep and carrying him back to where he belongs.

But then in today's Gospel reading, Jesus gives us another model with which to work. He tells His disciples that "whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you.'"

That is, if someone has rejected and stayed away from Christ and His Church, that person needs to understand that there are consequences for those actions, or lack of actions, as the case may be. C.F.W Walther said, "There cannot be faith in a heart that has not first been terrified." The Lord tells His disciples to "wipe the dust off your feet" so it is made clear to those who have rejected the Word of God that they have no part or fellowship with the believers. Because the one who hears you, hears Jesus. And the one who rejects you, rejects Jesus. And the one who rejects Jesus, rejects the Father who sent Him, as our Lord says in our Gospel reading today.

The Lord has given us, basically, these two models to be guides for our actions: seeking the Lost Sheep and wiping the dust off your feet. Unfortunately, there is no handbook on how to best apply these models for each individual situation that arises.

C.F.W. Walther does also say that in regard to applying Law and Gospel, the Gospel must predominate. Paul tells us in our Epistle reading that "if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of

gentleness.”

At Ian’s ordination, as we do whenever a man is ordained into the office of the ministry, the pastors who are present will gather around him, lay hands on him, and each offer a blessing which includes a Bible passage. When it was my turn, I said, “May your ministry be a ministry of grace. For, as St. Paul says, “we are saved by grace through faith, it is a gift from God, not by works, lest any man should boast.”

Whether you are a pastor or a layperson, as we look at our interaction with those who express apathy and unbelief, don’t beat yourself up if that person fails in their relationship with God. And don’t pat yourself on the back too much if the Lord calls them to be among the “sons of peace.” Coming to faith is the work of the Holy Spirit who works through the Means of Grace – God’s Word and Sacrament. May the Word of God be active in your life and at the forefront of what you say and do. In the hymn we just sang, the second verse says, “If you cannot speak like angels, If you cannot preach like Paul, You can tell the love of Jesus, You can say He died for all.”

You do not have to be an eloquent speaker to share the Gospel. The witness of a lifetime of devotion to the Lord is a powerful witness in this world of apathy and unbelief. But our confidence is not in ourselves. Have confidence in the faith of your Baptism. Have confidence in the Word of God which will never return empty. Have confidence in Christ who is Lord of this plentiful harvest. Amen.