

Year A

Matthew 9:35-10:23

I would like to remind you of a story I have told you before.

A very religious man was once caught in rising floodwaters. He climbed onto the roof of his house and trusted God to rescue him.

A neighbour came by in a canoe and said, “The waters will soon be above your house. Hop in and we’ll paddle to safety.”

“No thanks” replied the religious man. “I’ve prayed to God and I’m sure he will save me”

A short time later the police came by in a boat. “The waters will soon be above your house. Hop in and we’ll take you to safety.”

“No thanks” replied the religious man. “I’ve prayed to God and I’m sure he will save me”

A little time later a rescue services helicopter hovered overhead, let down a rope ladder and said. “The waters will soon be above your house. Climb the ladder and we’ll fly you to safety.”

“No thanks” replied the religious man. “I’ve prayed to God and I’m sure he will save me”

All this time the floodwaters continued to rise, until soon they reached above the roof

and the religious man drowned. When he arrived at heaven he demanded an audience with God. Ushered into God's throne room he said, "Lord, why am I here in heaven? I prayed for you to save me, I trusted you to save me from that flood."

"Yes you did my child" replied the Lord. "And I sent you a canoe, a boat and a helicopter. But you never got in."

We all can suffer from an inability to see the obvious and that is especially the case when it comes to prayer. In our Gospel reading today, in Matthew's Gospel, we find the only occurrence in the entire Gospel of the word

‘apostle’. An apostle is one who is sent to accomplish a task, as opposed to a disciple who is one who follows. Having just been asked to pray for labourers to tend to the harvest, Jesus called his disciples together. No doubt they looked at each other for a moment, maybe they all looked down at their shoes! Before they knew where they were, it became evidently clear that they themselves were the answer to their own prayers. They were to be the labourers to the harvest, sent out, commissioned by Jesus for that task. They were to go to the Jews exclusively. That might seem a strange restriction from

our perspective today. After all, the Christian Church today is almost entirely Gentile in makeup. It's made clear through the teaching of the early Church that there are no longer any Jews or Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so why do we find this emphatic command of Christ to the first apostles to go only to the lost sheep of Israel? Matthew, in naming the twelve apostles and in recording Jesus' command to go exclusively to the Jews is drawing an analogy between the apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel. Here is the New Israel of God being formed and commissioned by the Messiah, Jesus. No

doubt there were tensions in the very early Church, composed mainly of Jewish people, over the scope and extent of the mission. What was the growing Church to do with new converts who were not of the same ethnic group and who brought their own cultural norms that maybe clashed with Jewish Christian sensitivities? So priority is given to the Jews but it is made clear in the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel that from then on the message was to go to the ends of the earth.

So it is important that we understand the model of the sending out of the apostles to be normative for all Christians.

There was a group called 'The Fisherman's Fellowship'. They were surrounded by streams and lakes full of hungry fish. They met regularly to discuss the call to fish, and the thrill of catching fish. They got excited about fishing!!

Someone suggested that they needed a philosophy of fishing, so they carefully defined and redefined fishing, and the purpose of fishing. They developed fishing strategies and tactics. Then they realised

that they had been going at it backwards. They had approached fishing from the point of view of the fisherman, and not from the point of view of the fish. How do fish view the world? How does the fisherman appear to the fish? What do fish eat, and when? These are all good things to know. So they began research studies, and attended conferences on fishing. Some travelled to far away places to study different kinds of fish, with different habits. Some got PhD's in fishology. But no one had yet gone fishing.

So a committee was formed to send out fishermen. As prospective fishing places

outnumbered fishermen, the committee needed to determine priorities.

A priority list of fishing places was posted on bulletin boards in all of the fellowship halls.

But still, no one was fishing. A survey was launched, to find out why... Most did not answer the survey, but from those that did, it was discovered that some felt called to study fish, a few to furnish fishing equipment, and several to go around encouraging the fisherman.

What with meetings, conferences, and seminars, they just simply didn't have time to fish.

Now, Jake was a newcomer to the Fisherman's Fellowship. After one stirring meeting of the Fellowship, Jake went fishing. He tried a few things, got the hang of it, and caught a choice fish. At the next meeting, he told his story, and he was honoured for his catch, and then scheduled to speak at all the Fellowship chapters and tell how he did it. Now, because of all the speaking invitations and his election to the board of directors of the Fisherman's Fellowship, Jake no longer has time to go fishing.

But soon he began to feel restless and empty. He longed to feel the tug on the line

once again. So he cut the speaking, he resigned from the board, and he said to a friend, "Let's go fishing." They did, just the two of them, and they caught fish.

The members of the Fisherman's Fellowship were many, the fish were plentiful, but the fishers were few.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few." The commissioning and sending extends to us all.

But the authority given was also qualified. They were to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven had come near and they were to demonstrate that fact through miraculous

activity. They were not to preach. That may seem very strange to us when much of our mission is concerned with words. We do a lot of talking about our faith: you are asked to do a lot of listening each week here. The apostles were sent out to demonstrate the truth of the assertion that God's rule was underway now. There is a necessary balance required between speaking and doing. We have arguably tilted the balance too far toward speech at the expense of action and so are open to the accusation that our words are empty rhetoric. There would come a time when the apostles would have to open their

mouths and explain their actions. That's precisely what they did on the day of Pentecost, but at this point they were called to be very careful with their mouths but very active in other ways.

It is abundantly clear from this text that those sent out will pay a high cost for their faithfulness. They will be like sheep among wolves. It's remarkable that Jesus was not interested in concealing from them the tough times that they would experience. He didn't appear to be selling this enterprise to them very well, was he? But what would be the good in not being straightforward? They

needed to know so that they could be ready and clearly they appreciated his honesty.

In 2004 Victor Yushchenko stood for the presidency of the Ukraine. Vehemently opposed by the ruling party, Yushchenko's face was disfigured and he almost lost his life when he was mysteriously poisoned. This was not enough to deter him from standing for the presidency.

On the day of the election Yushchenko was comfortably in the lead. The ruling party, not to be denied, tampered with the results. The state-run television station reported "ladies and gentlemen, we announce that the

challenger Victor Yushchenko has been decisively defeated.”

In the lower right-hand corner of the screen a woman by the name of Natalia Dmitruk was providing a translation service for the deaf community. As the news presenter regurgitated the lies of the regime, Natalia Dmitruk refused to translate them. “I’m addressing all the deaf citizens of Ukraine” she signed. “They are lying and I’m ashamed to translate those lies. Yushchenko is our president.”

The deaf community sprang into gear. They text messaged their friends about the

fraudulent result and as news spread of Dmitruk's act of defiance increasing numbers of journalists were inspired to likewise tell the truth. Over the coming weeks the "Orange Revolution" occurred as a million people wearing orange made their way to the capital city of Kiev demanding a new election. The government was forced to meet their demands, a new election was held and Victor Yushchenko became president.

Nothing would have happened without the bravery of Natalia Dmitruk. She did what she knew was right despite a full awareness of the risks involved. The first apostles were

in a similar situation. They knew the consequences but that made no difference at all to their response to the call.

The long run of Sundays after Pentecost has begun. During this time we will be encouraged to examine our response to Jesus' call? We are all sent out with our eyes open. Let us trust God for all our needs as seek to be faithful disciples.