

## “Ask the Boss”

Matthew 9:35-10:7

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • June 9, 2013

As you know, there are a lot of great things about living in Corpus Christi. The year-round mild climate certainly is at the top of the list. Our winters are warmer and our summers cooler than most of Texas. That means you can enjoy the outdoors most of the year. If you like to garden, you can do grow plants that people in most parts of the country can only grow as houseplants. We have some of the best fishing and hunting in the country and there are miles and miles of beaches. It's almost like paradise.

And yet it's not. Things are not right in our community. A glance at the headlines shows that there have been three murders in the last week alone. Ten people were arrested for prostitution. More than 3000 people in Corpus Christi are homeless. In the area around our church, half the residents are below the poverty line and 71% have household incomes below \$25,000. Forty four percent never completed high school. Nearly one out of every five babies born in the Coastal Bend is born to a teenage mother and one out of every six residents in Corpus Christi is diabetic. Our city ranks second-to-last in literacy among U.S. cities with populations over 250,000. And God has placed us as a church right here in the middle of it.

In today's reading from Matthew Jesus begins to show us what we should be doing as a church. He shows us why we even exist. “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, *teaching* in their synagogues and *proclaiming* the gospel of the kingdom and *healing* every disease and every affliction.” This is almost identical to the Matthew 4:23, which comes just before the Sermon on the Mount. This is what scholars call an “inclusio.” It's like bookends. We find this a lot in the Bible and it lets us know that

everything in between is connected. Matthew says that Jesus travelled around with a group of students teaching, preaching and healing. Then he gives us specifics about Jesus' teaching and preaching and healing. Then, as we learn at the end of our passage, Jesus sends his students out to do the same thing, to preach and to heal.

This morning there are four things I want us to learn: the *condition*, the *compassion*, the *call*, and finally the *commission*. First is the *condition* of the people. The crowds are described as “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Harassed and helpless is probably not the best translation. The idea is really that the people, who are compared to sheep, have been attacked and left beaten, bruised, and mangled. That could just as easily describe many people who live in our community. They are at the end of their rope. What they need is hope and help.

That leads us to the second point, the *compassion*. Verse 36 says, “When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.” When the people are described as sheep without a shepherd, Jesus is really pointing the finger at the Jewish leaders of the time and he's pointing to an Old Testament passage from Ezekiel 34 which says, “Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they

were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.”

In that passage God goes on to say that He Himself will search out his lost sheep and bring them back. And of course Jesus referred to himself as the Good Shepherd. Unlike the rulers who were only concerned with themselves, Jesus had compassion on the people because of their suffering. As His followers, it seems to me that we should have that same kind of compassion when we see the suffering around us, and we do. The source of our mission work is Jesus’ compassion. You have the opportunity through the ministries of this church to help people get out of poverty, to help children learn to read, to help women and teens who are pregnant or are dealing with domestic abuse. In other words, as a part of this church you can put your compassion to work, just as Jesus and his disciples did.

My third point is the *call*. Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” When we look around our city we can see that indeed the harvest is plentiful. There are opportunities all around us to introduce people to Jesus as we meet their physical needs. But Jesus doesn’t say to his disciples, “the harvest is plentiful so get busy and try harder.” Instead, His first priority is prayer.

Jesus says, “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” The need we see all around us is first and foremost a call to prayer. I think we learn several things from this. Most importantly, it is God’s harvest. He is Lord of the harvest and He is the one who sends out the workers. In fact, when people go out

thinking things like, “it’s MY ministry,” other people end up getting hurt or the person burns out. But if God is the one who sends you, instead of burning out you will be energized by the work.

That’s where prayer comes in. When you earnestly pray that God would send workers into His fields, you will discover that *you* are one of the workers He wants to send. But it also causes us to admit that we can’t do it all alone. It’s not your field and you are not the only worker. Prayer puts us in a correct state of dependence upon God to meet the need. The leadership of this church, the elders, have decided that prayer is an area our church life that we would like to improve. Later this summer we will focus on learning to pray better and then in the Fall we are going to launch some congregation-wide prayer initiatives that I hope you will participate in so that together we can pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into his harvest.

Finally we come to the *commission*. Jesus certainly had lots of followers but he chooses twelve of them to be disciples and we’re told that he “gave them *authority* over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.” We’ve talked a lot over the past few weeks about Jesus’ authority, first in his teaching and then his authority over disease and nature and even death. Now he delegates some of that authority to his disciples.

But that’s not the only authority he gives them. Matthew 10:5 says, “These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And *proclaim* as you go, saying ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” In other words, Jesus is entrusting them with the authority of his Word. To reject the teaching of the Apostles, the Bible, is to reject the One who sent them, Jesus. And to reject Jesus is to

reject God. Jesus commissions the Apostles, which is really the commissioning of the Church. By the way, an apostle is someone who is sent while a disciple is a student. Jesus sends them out with instructions and he sends us out as well.

Along the way, as we're sent, we need to make sure we see the condition of the people, who are all created in the image of

God. We should be moved to compassion for them, just as Jesus was, which should send us to our knees in prayer that God would move. And then we are to go, teaching and proclaiming and healing as workers sent into God's fields here in Corpus Christi and to the ends of the earth.

*Amen*