



June 15 • 2008

Focus Scripture

**Matthew 9:35—10:8,
(9–23)**

Additional Scriptures

Genesis 18:1–15, (21:1–7)

Psalms 116:1–2, 12–19

Romans 5:1–8

God of compassion and mercy, strengthen our resolve to say yes to your call to love as you have loved us. Send us to form relationships of care and compassion with all who live in need, following the example of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Named for a Purpose

Acting with great compassion, Jesus extends the reach of God’s liberating justice by naming others for the purpose of sharing in the work of revealing God’s coming realm. Jesus sends those who have followed and learned from him. Though the journey likely will lead through precarious places, God’s presence will energize and sustain those who say yes to Jesus’ call.

**Focus Scripture: Matthew 9:35 — 10:8,
(9–23)**

Recall that Matthew’s gospel strives to show how Jesus’ life and ministry are steeped in the traditions of Hebrew Scriptures. So, when Matthew reports that Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion for them, Jesus’ assessment of their situation as being “like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36) is an echo of Moses’ assessment of the people of Israel prior to his death (Numbers 27:15–19). As Moses commissioned Joshua to carry on his work, Jesus commissions the disciples to extend the reach of the gospel.

In the New Testament, “harvest” serves as a symbol of God’s coming reign (Matthew 13:30, 39; Revelation 14:15). Harvesting is urgent work – all other tasks must be set aside when the crop is ready. Jesus declares there is such urgency in the disciples’ task, as many are in need of liberation, justice, wholeness, and restored relationship with God.

Matthew’s account names twelve disciples as apostles – symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel in Hebrew history. *Apostle* is from a Greek word that means “those who are sent.” This text tells us something about their background. The names in Matthew 10:2–4 do not imply that there were only these disciples. Other people followed and served Jesus – including Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Susanna, Bartimaeus, Nicodemus, and many more. The list invites us to add our own names as those whom Jesus calls and sends.

The tasks entrusted to the twelve are awesome. “Proclaim the good news” may seem standard fare for a disciple. But cure the sick? Raise the dead? Cast out demons? In considering this calling, return to 10:1, where Jesus gives them “authority over unclean spirits.” Jesus desires that those who are sent will be able to prevail and offer healing. Likewise, when the

church works in Jesus’ name today, we do not speak or act on our own. We go in the name and authority of Christ.

Continuing the reading through 10:23 is an option for today. Instructions for the journey follow here. After a few verses with advice on hospitality, the remaining verses reflect the more difficult realities faced by the church in Matthew’s time. Going in the name and authority of Jesus does not insulate people and communities of faith from hard times. Yet even in those times, God will provide what is needed.

In great compassion, God acts to create and sustain life. **Genesis 18:1–15, (21:1–7)** affirms that even when hope seems laughable, God will bestow new life. The Matthew and Genesis texts also lift up how our welcome of others may open us to the presence of God. In receiving those sent by God, we receive the blessings of new life.

In great compassion, God creates and sustains hope. In **Romans 5:1–8**, Paul asserts how suffering need not end in despair, because of God’s love that continues to pour into our hearts. The psalmist in **Psalms 116:1–2, 12–19** declares that even in death, a life lived in faithfulness remains precious to God. There may be suffering on the way of following God’s leading. But as the psalmist and Paul declare: God hears and loves us. Such faith brings us peace for the journey.



God calls each one of us by name to the urgent work of carrying God’s love and care into the world, looking on all people with compassion, as did Jesus. As did the first apostles, we can trust in God to sustain us on the way. To what urgent work is Christ calling you and your church today?

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