

2. Stories of Jesus
Sharing the Work
Matthew 9:35-10:8

I'm starting out with a confession this morning. I share a malady that is common to almost all preachers. Preachers need to be needed. Buried within most preachers is this fantasy that their members are able to make it through each day because of the love and care and wisdom their preacher provides them. The most successful preachers are often the ones with the greatest need to be needed.

And there are some members who are glad to feed their preachers need to be needed. I've told you that my youngest brother is a Baptist preacher. He became a Baptist preacher at the age of 16. Well, I've got another brother who became a preacher a little over a year ago. He is a part time local pastor in a little Methodist in the Henderson area. A local pastor is one who hasn't been through seminary and isn't ordained. The little church my brother pastors has about forty or fifty members. They pay little. So, my brother has taken a job as an assistant manager of a Bible Book Store to supplement his income. When one of the members found out about that, she just went into a panic. She said, "What will I do when I need to talk to you, and you are working?"

This woman is saying, "There are days I just can't get through unless I can talk with my pastor." And many pastors--in fact, most pastors—love for their members to say things like that. I told my brother not to get caught in that trap. The next time he hears someone make a comment like that, just respond by saying, "Try praying." People need to depend on God to get them through their day, not their pastor or any other person.

I would like to say that I am different. But I'm not. I enjoy being needed.

That's why it was a bit tough for me when I came here. We have an active Stephen Ministry. Stephen Ministry are members who are trained to support and care for others who are going through an especially difficult time. Now, I've always said that I wanted a Stephen Ministry team in the churches I have pastored. But I've never started one. Why? I suspect it is because I was afraid that if there were a Stephen Ministry, the church members wouldn't need me.

Since coming to Chapelwood I've had to wrestle with my need to be needed. I'm struggling with the reality that there are others who can be more effective at meeting people's needs than me, because they can spend more time and be closer to members in need than I can. I've had to make the decision to put the needs of the members ahead of my need to be needed.

Jesus didn't have that problem. People really did need Jesus. Yet Jesus was more concerned about the needs of the people than he was his own need to be needed. He saw that there were so many who needed so much that he would never be able to get around to all of them. So, he called the disciples together and sent them out to do his work of caring for people.

Jesus gave the disciples three things: He gave them training, authority and freedom.

First he gave them training. The disciples had been following Jesus for many months at this point. They had observed him as he ministered to the people. They had seen how he did it. That was their most important training.

But Jesus had a few words of instruction before he sent them out. Basically he told them not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to minister to the Jewish people. Why was that? The disciples were not ready for that ministry. They were ready to take baby steps, and reaching out to the Gentiles was a giant step. They needed to first minister to people they understood, people who were like them.

For many years I was the chair of the Conference Committee on Drug and Alcohol Abuse. I put together workshops on addiction and treating addiction. I have learned quite a bit about these topics. But I am not an effective counselor for the addicted. The reason is that I have never been addicted to drugs or alcohol. Most of the effective drug and alcohol counselors I have known are recovering addicts and alcoholics. And, of course, the most effective program is Alcoholics Anonymous, a fellowship of recovering addicts and alcoholics. The reason for their effectiveness is that they understand what it is to be addicted. They understand how the addicted think and feel. And they can be an example to the addicted. By their own example they can say, “You can say to drugs and alcohol. It can be done. I’m living proof of that.” They can be effective because they have walked that road.

Christ calls most of us to minister to people who are like us—people who share our lifestyles, or people who share our struggles. This week one of our members had surgery for breast cancer. We have several members who have gone through that. They are helping her and her family. They can do that effectively, because they understand. They have been there.

So, Jesus told the disciples to go to the Jewish people, because the disciples were Jews. They understood what it was like to live under the Jewish law. They could share the gospel of grace and forgiveness to a people filled with guilt and shame because they were trying to live up to impossible standards. Their whole lives had been spent preparing for ministry to Jewish people.

So, Jesus gave them instructions to do what they were prepared to do and not to try to do what they were not prepared to do.

And Jesus gave them authority. There is nothing more frustrating than to be given a task to do and not be given the authority to do it. Some people are not willing to share their authority. Again, that was not a problem for Jesus. He was more than happy to give his disciples as much authority as they could handle. He still is.

The danger is that people are tempted to love authority more than people. You may recall the story of Simon the Magician. Simon was a man who was able to do amazing things. People were amazed by his powers. Simon happened to be present when Peter laid hands on some new Christians and they received the Holy Spirit. Now Simon was amazed and impressed that Peter had the authority to do something so wonderful. He wanted that power for himself. He went to Peter and offered him a large sum of money if Peter would give him that power. Peter was angered by the offer. Peter was given that authority by Christ because Christ knew that Peter cared more about ministering to people’s needs than the power and prestige of having authority.

If you really care about people, Christ will give you the authority you need to do what he has called you to do. Jesus is not jealous of his authority. He gladly shares it with us, if we will simply use it the way it was meant to be used.

Jesus shares authority.

And Jesus frees us to do the work he has called us to do. Jesus sent the disciples out on their own. He didn't micromanage them. He trusted them enough to let them do the ministry he sent them out to do.

When John Wesley was living with the Moravians in Germany and learning about salvation by faith from them, he finally had to break away from them over an issue called "quietism." The Moravians taught that you must not do anything (you must remain quiet and passive) unless you had an overwhelming sense of being compelled by the Spirit of Christ to do it.

John Wesley would have none of that. He believed you should never pass up an opportunity to do good. Remember John Wesley's Rule:

**Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.**

Jesus sent his disciples out to do good. He gave them the freedom to do whatever good they could do.

Jesus does the same for you and me. He still does. You and I have been trained by our life experiences and by the church to minister to certain people in the name of Christ. Christ is with us to encourage us, empower us and guide us. But Christ wants on to get on with it. You have been trained, empowered and freed to go out and do all the good you can.

We follow a great leader, a leader who knows how to delegate and does so joyfully. Let's get to work.

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