

Willow River Parish—Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest United Methodist

Matthew 10:5-15

Jesus sent these twelve out and commanded them, “Don’t go among the Gentiles or into a Samaritan city. Go instead to the lost sheep, the people of Israel. As you go, make this announcement: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, and throw out demons. You received without having to pay. Therefore, give without demanding payment. Workers deserve to be fed, so don’t gather gold or silver or copper coins for your money belts to take on your trips. Don’t take a backpack for the road or two shirts or sandals or a walking stick. Whatever city or village you go into, find somebody in it who is worthy and stay there until you go on your way. When you go onto a house, say, ‘Peace!’ If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if the house isn’t worthy, take back your blessing. If anyone refuses to welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet as you leave that house or city. I assure you that it will be more bearable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on Judgment Day than it will be for that city.”

1. Good for What Ails Us

Before modern medical science really took off in the last fifty years of the past millennium, there were a lot of home and folk remedies being prescribed by well meaning individuals, but also by con artists and charlatans. The remedy was often administered accompanied by the phrase that the supposed cure was “good for what ails you.” The classic, all-purpose remedy for nearly every condition was a table-spoonful of castor oil. Perhaps some of you suffered through that treatment or gave it to someone else.

If you google the phrase “good for what ails you” on the internet, you will find interesting results. It will result in quite an interesting list of old and new products and activities that were or are supposedly good for what ails us. There were a couple of sites online that promoted humor as a good remedy

for just about anything bad. Another site featured a jazz song with the lyric, “Love is good for anything that ails you.” It’s hard to argue with that one!

According to the World Wide Web, Siberian ginseng and Yemeni honey are really good for you, as well as massage therapy, owning a pet, and aromatherapy. Among all the old creams, salves, and liniments used a century ago was this one: Brame’s Pain Knocker. The ingredients? 1.5% tincture of opium, 1.5% chloroform, and a whopping 88% alcohol. Now there’s a cure for what ails you!

2. **What Ails Us**

Seriously, what does ail us? What ails the world?

Everywhere we turn we are confronted with a society and lives full of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual sickness. How do we respond? What effect does the crowd have on us? Does its frenzied panic suck us in? Does its weary resignation fill us with fear or loathing? Or does the sight of the crowd, harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, fill us with compassion, as it did with Jesus?

Jesus came with the remedy for what ails the world—the good news of the reign of God’s love, come to earth in Him. The love of God has broken into our world in a radically new and paradoxically powerful way, bringing life, health, wholeness, and cleansing through the forgiveness of sins. Part of the paradox of the good news is that Jesus’ followers—formerly harassed and panicked sheep without a shepherd themselves—are integral to God’s remedy.

3. Jesus' Mission

Jesus had gathered the twelve disciples together. He gave them authority over unclean spirits and the power to heal every disease and sickness. He sent them out with specific instructions.

Jesus told them to not go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans. They were to go to the people of Israel. Jesus knew that Israel was where things were to begin. The message would spread out from Israel to the Gentiles and the Samaritans. The message needed to start with Israel. That message was “the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

They were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the skin diseases and throw out demons. They were to do these things without asking for payment. They weren't to gather money for their money belts or take backpacks with them. They weren't to take extra clothes or a walking stick. They were to depend on the kindness of strangers. They were to deliver peace to a house that was worthy, but not to houses that were unworthy. Those that refuse them would be worse than the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jesus would later tell them that they would be handed over to councils and beaten. They would be hauled in front of governors and kings. At those times, they should trust in God. God would give them the words to say. People would hate them because of Jesus. God would be with them the whole time.

This was certainly some kind of evangelism. It was a kind of evangelism that would not work today. However, it was the evangelism plan that was needed then.

4. Evangelism

Evangelism is a word that seems to have lost its effectiveness. Somehow on its journey from the Jerusalem of yesterday to the Jericho of today, it has fallen among thieves that have wounded it and stripped it, departed, leaving it half dead. It takes a rather rash Samaritan, therefore, to dare turn aside to set this poor chap upon his beast and take him to an inn and take care of him. This is especially true because a veritable procession of Priests and Levites are passing by, not only refusing to lend a hand, but, we fear, inwardly chuckling at the plight of the poor fellow, and secretly hoping that they are soon to see the last of him.

5. Early History

During America's early years, our land was filled with evangelism. It's no wonder there is a Methodist and Congregational Church in nearly every town in New England today. Circuit riders were so relentless in their ministry that on stormy days there was a proverbial saying: "There is nothing out today but crows and Methodist preachers."

If it worked before, why not again today? The only question of success is really, "Are we going?"

6. St. Francis

There is a wonderful legend about St. Francis. One day, St. Francis informed his brethren that he planned to go into the nearby village on a preaching mission. He invited a novice to go with him.

On their way, they passed an injured man and Francis promptly stopped, saw to the poor fellow's needs and arranged medical care for him. They went on and soon passed a homeless man who was near starvation. Again, Francis

stopped his journey and ministered to the hungry, homeless man. So it went, throughout the day: people in need, Francis lovingly caring for them as best he could until the sun was low in the sky. He told his novice friend it was time for them to return to the monastery for evening prayers. The young man said, “Father, you said we were coming to town to preach to the people.” Francis smiled. Then he said, “My friend, that’s what we’ve been doing all day.”

That’s evangelism at its most faithful. Ministry to people in their need—not worrying about numerical growth, or adding to one’s own conversion record, or winning acclaim within the denomination. Evangelism is sharing the love of God in concrete form among God’s people.

7. The Right Cup?

Carl Boyle, a sales representative, was driving home when he saw a group of young children selling Kool-Aid on a corner in his neighborhood. They had posted the typical hand scrawled sign over their stand: “Kool-Aid, 10 cents.” Carl was intrigued. He pulled over to the curb. A young man approached and asked if he would like strawberry or grape Kool-Aid. Carl placed his order and handed the boy a quarter. After much deliberation, the children determined he had some change coming and rifled through the cigar box until they finally came up with the correct amount. The boy returned with the change, then stood by the side of the car. He asked if Carl was finished drinking. Carl said, “Just about. Why?” The boy answered, “That’s the only cup we have, and we need it to stay in business.”

It’s difficult to operate a Kool-Aid business if you only have one cup. We sometimes make that mistake in the church.

This morning we are focusing our attention on the evangelistic task of the church. For many persons the word evangelism brings to mind one cup: The

televangelist and the tent revival, or the street corner preacher handing out tracts. In some churches, it means a once a year special event or a particular strategy for incorporating newcomers into the life of the church.

By limiting our vision of evangelism to one of these cups, we may be stifling Christ's work on earth and cheating ourselves out of one of the most rewarding endeavors Christ offers us: Evangelism.

8. Collaboration

The 1963 movie "Lilies of the Field" gave Sidney Poitier the Oscar for Best Actor, the first African American to win that award.

The story is set in the Arizona desert. Poitier portrays an itinerant laborer named Homer Smith, who pulls off the road seeking water for his battered car's radiator. He discovers a group of impoverished nuns, refugees from war-torn Europe, now eking out a living from the dry soil. The Mother Superior believes Homer Smith's accidental arrival is God's answer to her prayers for someone who will come and build a chapel of adobe bricks on the ruins of an earlier failed attempt.

He at first wants to be paid. He ends up building the chapel, taking a part-time job to pay for materials. He inspires many of the Hispanic day laborers in the region to donate materials and labor. Homer realizes that his skills in design and supervision coupled with the back-breaking labor that others gladly share makes this uniquely both his triumph and the community's accomplishment. Collaboration became important.

The same is important for evangelism. Collaboration becomes important. It is something we need to do together.