

What Do You *Do*?
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June 14 2026
Apostles Anglican Church
Year A Third Sunday After Pentecost
Scriptures: Exod 19; Psalm 100; Rom 5; Matthew 9-10

It is graduation season, which means that many young adults, whether they are finishing high school, college, or graduate school are getting asked the same question over and over, probably so much that they are tired of hearing it: "What are you going to do next?" That question will be followed by a lifetime of questions about vocation, meeting strangers who ask no longer in the future sense, but in the present or past: "What do you do?" "What did you do?"

Have you ever had to describe your vocation, your day job, your passion, whatever it is God is calling you to in day to day life, in just a short sentence?

I found a list online of folks who wrote in response to a blog post, describing their careers in the silliest way they could think of. The novelist for teenage boys wrote that the job was to "find as many synonyms for 'explosion' as possible." A pilot wrote that the job was to "spend most of the day looking out the window." A college professor wrote that the job was to "talk in other people's sleep."¹ That last one might be a good descriptor for the job of the preacher as well! A short, quippy description of one's work can bring some humility and some perspective.

¹ <https://www.scribd.com/document/76631177/50-Funniest-Short-Job-Descriptions-Ever>

How should we succinctly describe our calling as Christians to be on mission? I like some of the language that I have heard recently of the Christian life being an “apprenticeship to Jesus,”² but what does that mean? Well, our Gospel reading for today gives us a clue.

Matthew’s gospel has been going through since the beginning of chapter 5, a balance between kingdom words and kingdom action. Matthew 5-7 is the Sermon on the Mount, the great giving of the Law from God the Son, not from Sinai, but from a hill in Galilee. Then, Jesus goes on a miracle spree. Lepers healed, storms stilled, demons cast out. He causes a paralytic to walk again. He calls, as we heard last week, a tax collector and he says yes - a miracle in its own right. A little girl is raised back from the dead. The blind see and the mute speak. That is chapter 8 and 9. Then we get to our passage where Jesus, having done and said all of that good, laments that there are so few to do the work among the harassed and helpless masses. You know if all of that was on any of our resumes, it would be pretty easy to let our foot off the gas, pat ourselves on the back, but Jesus desires for his kingdom to come in an even bigger way. So he enlists some help.

He calls the twelve, listed here by name, to go out into the broader land of Judea and do the same sorts of things Jesus has done and proclaim the same sort of things Jesus has proclaimed. “Alright all you who would follow me,” Jesus says, “go and bring my words and my actions to the people who need it.” “Proclaim the arrival of God’s Kingdom. Heal the sick.” If you ever need a re-affirmation that the Gospel is to be preached in word and in action, and not one separated from the other, look at the

² John Mark Comer is someone who uses this phrase.

example of Jesus in Matthew 5-9 and his calling to the disciples here. He calls for both.

Remember it is this same group of disciples, minus Judas, to whom Jesus gives the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's gospel, extending the borders of the mission of the Kingdom beyond the lost sheep of Israel to include the whole world, a mission whose mandate stretches to each and every one of us who would follow Jesus. So as we search for that guiding principle or set of guiding principles to inform our own mission to spread God's kingdom to the ends of the Earth, let's look to this initial mission given to the 12 apostles.

First I want us to see the impetus of Jesus' mission. Why does Jesus send out his disciples? Matthew 9:36, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

If we see someone in need of Jesus' love and compassion, no matter what they look like, where they are from, or what they have done, and our first instinct is not to have compassion on them, we begin from the wrong place. Love wills the good for the sake of the other. When we pass by that window, as Fr. David showed us so well last week and we look in to see those people that he cares about, we are likely to see some things that give us pause, maybe even for good reason! Let that never quell our compassion for them.

Jesus' compassion does not excuse or affirm sin. But it does lift up every single person made in God's image that it sees. Among those crowds that Jesus looked

upon with compassion, I am confident there were people who were not living according to God's Law. If we are going to go on Jesus' mission, we need to pray to have his eyes. And so that means looking on even our enemies, when they are harassed and helpless, and having compassion on them. It is where Jesus starts, and so it is where we start.

Next I want to touch on a little bit about the identity-giving and identity-forming nature of Jesus' mission. This kingdom-centered, others-centered mission on which Jesus sends us is where we find our identity. We human beings are identity seeking creatures. That is why we have political extremism, it's why we have workaholism, it is why we have bumper stickers. "Look at me, I am this sort of person!" You go look at the front vanity license plate of my car out in the parking lot, I'm celebrating a World Series victory that happened 5 years ago by a group of guys I don't even know. But that is what I want everyone who passes me on the road to know about me, I am an Atlanta Braves guy. We seek to have our identity in someone or something.

God made us and knows this about us. Think back to the story we heard from Exodus this morning. The people of Israel have just been rescued from 400 years in slavery. That is an identity-forming reality. For four centuries of forced labor, they were told who they were day in and day out by the Egyptians - you are ours, you work for us, we own you. And so, when God liberates them, there is some restructuring of identity that needs to take place, so he brings them to Sinai (it's important to note that the Exodus has a direction, that is towards God.) At Sinai he gives them his Law, but he also reaffirms the covenant with them that was made

with their ancestor Abraham. Hear again what God says to the people through Moses:

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”³

God tells these people in search of an identity that it is to be found in relationship with him and in mission to the world. You are mine and you will be my kingdom of priests in the world. A priest is someone who acts as a mediator between God and humanity. That is the sort of role that Israel was to play among the nations.

It is the same sort of offer that Jesus makes to the disciples, fresh off of his own Sinai moment in the sermon on the Mount, he tells his disciples to go and be the connection point between the people of Israel and the Kingdom of God that has now arrived.

This week I was thinking back at the first time I preached on this passage, back in 2017 and so I went back and read that sermon. One of the things that stuck out to me on that reading that is worth exploring again is the fact that it is in the mission of linking up with Jesus’ kingdom work that the disciples find their true identity. It is in this context of others-centered mission that the disciples are named. Jesus will say elsewhere that those who hold tightly to their lives will lose them and those who surrender their lives for his sake will find them.⁴ I find it interesting that the reason

³ Exodus 19:5-6

⁴ Matthew 16:24-25

we know the names of the disciples, listed here one by one in Matthew 10, is that they were willing to lay down their identities at Jesus' feet, only to receive them back as they were intended to have them.

So if the impetus of our mission is the compassion of God granted through us as we look through the eyes of Jesus, and that mission then forms our identity, how do we implement that mission? What do we do?

The work Jesus sends his disciples on is healing work. Verses 7-8 of chapter 10 shows that the disciples are to do the work that Jesus has just been doing throughout chapters 8 and 9. Jesus says "[P]roclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons." A posture of compassion leads to the action of healing. Christians are bridge builders in a world where the bridges all seem to be on fire.

Of course, healing is not always an enjoyable process as anyone who has recovered from a serious injury or illness will tell you. We are not called to be feel-good chaplains to pat a post-Christian Culture on its back. Doctors don't just hand out candy all day. But if we went into our lives with the intent to heal where everyone else was looking for a fight, how would that change our posture? How would that change the words we say to one another, the words we type online at one another? Ask yourselves this morning, "Am I doing work that pulls the world back together, or am I helping to tear it apart? A couple weeks ago I shared about leave no trace camping. There was another policy that was part of my upbringing: leave a place

better than you found it. Are the spaces you enter better than when you arrived? We need to recapture the healing nature of our calling.

Finally, how are we to be sustained in mission? What will keep us going? Jesus went around healing people and proclaiming the good news, but he was God! What chance do we have? Jesus makes clear to his disciples: it is not through our own efforts - "Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff."⁵ Well, Jesus that is kind of all the stuff that one needs on a journey like the one you are proposing! Don't take a change of clothes?! When we took a trip to Chile to serve with the Smiths a couple years back , we were painting and we had to sit next to one another, so we definitely encouraged bringing a change of clothes!

What is Jesus' point? Lean not on your own understanding, your own power, your own status. Trust that God will provide. It is through him and through the ones he calls that you will be sustained. I have lost track of the number of times that I am approaching or in the midst of a more difficult week in ministry and I try all the things to get ready, but it is a chance encounter, a passing conversation that I did not expect, often with one of you, that gets me through. God knows what we need. He is gracious to give it to us.

Finally, Jesus addresses one thing in which we cannot find our sustenance for mission. Other's opinions of us. "And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I

⁵ Matthew 10:9-10

say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.”

I’m a recovering people-pleaser. I am a first born and certified nice young man ™ (though a little less young these days). If someone is unhappy with me or doesn’t like something that I say, I have a hard time getting over it. But finding validation in what others think of us will lead to surrendering our mission. Some battles aren’t ours to fight. We are not going to win everybody. The Gospel will look like foolishness to some. The results of God’s mission are up to God, not us. We are called to faithful obedience.

So look with eyes of compassion. Find yourself in the mission of your creator. Do the work of healing. And don’t let the fickleness of human opinion get you off track. Jesus still calls us in his kingdom mission to spread the good news in word and in deed. He’s calling to you, to! Will you listen?