

## “Licensed to Heal”

**First Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Dave Carlson  
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**Old Testament lesson:** Psalm 107:17-22

**New Testament lesson:** Matthew 10:1-8

Have you ever been summoned for jury duty? I was, a few years ago. I showed up and they said certain folks did not have to serve. Among the list of people automatically excused were public safety personnel, health care providers, and clergy.

I took the out -it was a very busy week- and hadn't given it much more thought. Until I read our scripture lesson for today where it says, “Jesus summoned his 12 disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.”

That got me thinking about all the ways we get asked to serve, and to what extent is it Jesus who summons us. Up to this point in the Gospel According to Matthew, the 12 disciples specifically called by Jesus have been following him as witnesses to his ministry. Now they are being empowered to go forth in his name. It's the transition from being one who is called to becoming one who is sent.

What were the qualifications of the 12 whom Jesus sent into the world on his behalf? There were four fishermen, a tax collector, a religious zealot (that's a political organizer or radical), and several others who were probably laborers and tradesmen. These are the people Jesus sends out to (quote) “cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, (and) cast out demons.” Clearly, if they are going to make such an impact, it will be because of who Jesus is not who they are and certainly not who they were before Jesus entered their lives. None of the 12 disciples was a healer or miracle worker, but through their faith in Jesus, each of them was able to accomplish more than could be imagined.

Take Peter, for instance. Peter is known to have raised the little girl Tabitha from the dead. And yet, beyond this and a few other healings, there's not much else reported. So I guess the real evidence of the disciples' power as those sent by Jesus is us -the churches they founded, the people they ministered to, the communities they impacted.

When Jesus sent them to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons, he was sending them to those places in this world where illness goes untreated, people feel dead inside, communities shut themselves off, and evil, misguided thoughts and actions rule the day. Just as the earliest disciples were sent by Jesus, Jesus sends us out into a world of need. But just how equipped are we to make a difference. What can we do?

In today's New Testament lesson, we read the names of the 12 apostles: Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus.

That's the list of the earliest disciples, but not all the disciples. There was also Paul and Luke and Stephen and the list goes on and on all the way up to today, where your name can be found on the list of people called by Jesus; people sent out into a world of need.

When you give a ride to someone going to the doctor, that's Jesus curing the sick. When you encourage someone who's feeling lifeless inside, that's Jesus raising the dead. When you welcome someone who the world has cast aside, that's Jesus cleansing the lepers. When you speak out against evil, misguided ways, that's Jesus casting out demons. We have been given this power as followers of Jesus. With any power, there are dangers, limitations and costs – power in this world comes at a price.

We see this in today's New Testament lesson. The first danger is failing to use the power we've been given, or worse yet, misusing it. Just because Jesus summoned the 12 disciples doesn't mean they had to follow. In fact, Judas is listed there and he betrayed Jesus. Even though this was in the fulfillment of the scriptures, it's a warning to us. Jesus has called many people who have not been willing to follow for one reason or another.

Sometimes it's because of worldly attachments, or fear, or conceit – self-righteousness, thinking they know better. The danger there is sickness goes untreated, lives are wasted, barriers erected, and terrible, horrific acts are carried out. That's what happens when good people fail to act, (or give in to) evil intentions, or just look the other way.

Dangers and limitations. There are limitations to what we as individuals can do. Jesus sent the disciples saying, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Israel represents the people chosen by God, those who are open to God's leading. Not everyone we try to help will accept what we have to offer. For instance, I was in downtown Kansas City a few weeks back when a man came up and said he was hungry – hadn't eaten in days. It just so happened I had some food in the car with me, so I offered it to him. He looked indignant and disgruntled and walked away. We can't help those who won't be helped. But that's no reason not to keep trying. Jesus never closed the door on someone, and neither should we. Remember, the gifts of ministry, help, and guidance that you have are Jesus' gifts to the world, given through you.

That's why Jesus says to the disciples, "You received without payment; give without payment." It's not about us, what we can get out of it. It's about helping others, even at the personal cost we take on – whether that's time, money, or mustering the courage to speak out, to offer help.

The power to minister on behalf of Jesus comes with dangers, limitations and costs. But it also comes with the assurance that you can make a difference.

To remind each of us here today of the difference we can make in being a healing presence in a hurting world, I have for each of you a small vial of healing oil, which the ushers will hand out today, as a reminder of your power to heal when there is hurt.

I am also aware that there are those here today who are in need of healing, in body or soul. You can use the healing oil on your temples or your neck, or better yet, ask someone else to message your neck.

The essential oil I have for you today is eucalyptus oil. Such oils are mentioned in the Bible for their rejuvenating properties. It can actually make you feel better when things are rough or the body is aching.

One of the most important things in being a servant of the Lord is your own health and wholeness. We have to take care of our own physical, mental, and spiritual health in order to be a true and present help to others.

God has a role for each and every one of us in making this a better world. And God has put in this world, loving people able to provide us the healing we need so that we can be a healing presence for others.

Let us all look for ways Jesus is calling us – calling you – to be a healing presence. Also, check to see if there's not some healing you need, in order to step into your role as one who is sent by Jesus as a balm of healing in a world of hurt.

Amen.

## Pastoral Prayer

Let us pray:

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise that, through Jesus, you healed the sick and fed the hungry.

With a few fish and couple loaves of bread, you fed a crowd of hundreds, and with grace to spare.

We, too, long to be fed. We, too, are in need of your healing touch. We come to you in prayer now with our needs and desires – some trivial, some profound – and through it all, you love us.

You are attentive to the deepest yearnings and the most hidden wounds of our hearts. Attend to us, once again, we pray.

We offer to you those who are sick and in need of your healing. We pray for the discouraged, the depressed and those in grief.

Comfort them, heal them and feed them the bread of life, sufficient for the journey.

We pray for the wounds of the world. We are bold to pray for an end to war, a release to the captives, and liberation for the oppressed.

O God, surely it was through your providence that, in the miraculous feeding of the thousands, there were 12 baskets of leftovers ... one for each disciple to take and share with others.

In the same way, O Lord, equip us as your disciples today. Give us the gifts of grace that we need to be a healing presence for others. Multiply our efforts beyond our imagining.

You have done so before; we pray you would do so again, here and now, among us, in the name of the one who taught us to pray, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive  
our debtors;  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,  
For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.**