

Pentecost 2-June 14, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Matthew 9:35-10:8-23 and Romans 5:1-8



“Justified by Faith-the Good News”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

The people that Jesus saw did not have it all together. The people that Jesus saw were not people who were at peace. The people that Jesus saw were taught by Jesus and healed by Jesus. But the only thing that gave this wandering sheep peace was to hear Jesus proclaim good news to them.

Many people followed Jesus and Jesus went to many places to deliver this good news. However, Jesus knew that he would need help to reach all people from all nations so he first gathered 12 disciples to help in proclaiming this good news so more people could hear this good news sooner. Getting summoned by Jesus to preach good news was not a glorious calling. Instead, it came with many instructions. Disciples were to travel light. They were to take nothing with them. The first disciples truly had to depend on receiving all forms of daily bread. They weren't given an expense account to take care of their food and lodging needs as they traveled from town to town. Jesus didn't call ahead to the next towns to ensure that his disciples would have nice places to stay. They weren't given noisy cans to take along to at least to receive some payment if their good news was well received. Jesus also warned these rookie preachers that some people would not be interested in hearing the good news they preached. Jesus didn't provide these disciples with debating skills to ensure everyone would welcome their good news. Jesus told his first disciples if they were not welcomed in a house and did not want to listen, they were simply to shake the dust from their feet and move on to the next house or town. Jesus also set boundaries where they were to preach. He instructed them to first preach to their neighbors. People they knew. But Jesus prepared them that even their neighbors might not welcome them into their homes. These disciples weren't promised protection from bodily harm. But they were promised to have the Holy Spirit as their advocate who would provide them with the right words to say.

This image of people wandering around as if they are sheep without a shepherd is not an image hard for us to see today. The solution for shepherdless sheep is the same today as it was when this image was seen by Jesus. The solution is for Jesus to deliver compassion. The solution for wandering sheep is not to let them find their own way. Sheep will only wander further away without hearing the voice of a shepherd.

Moses was given words to deliver to the Israelites. These words were not words of compassion, but words commanded them what to do and not to do. And after hearing the command, the scripture reading for today ends with these words, "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do." All the people answered as one and told Moses that they would do what they were told to do. But the end of this scripture reading is not the end of the story. The rest of the story is that the chosen people of God did not do everything they were told to do. The rest of the story is that God's chosen people were never at rest or peace because they continually failed to obey what God had commanded. These chosen people felt if they had judges or kings to remind them of what they were to do and to administer justice when people failed to keep the law, there would be peace.

Peace is never found in administering justice according to the law. Peace is not found in trying to convince others that we are right, and they are wrong. We have seen reminders on the news lately that even if there is no violence or damage done in what are called "peaceful demonstrations or protests", putting the words peaceful and protests doesn't seem to go together. Trying to do the right thing during this pandemic does not result in peace even if we think we are right in what we are doing. And this lack of peace doesn't just apply if we wear a mask when we go shopping and follow the arrows telling us where to go in the stores. It is even hard to find peace in worship when we think peace comes from the way we worship. Peace is not found if we think on-line worship is better than worshiping in person. Nor is peace found by ignoring all precautions of worshiping safely. Peace isn't found thinking it is better to sing with appropriate social distancing compared to humming hymns with your mouth closed. So where do sheep who wander aimlessly find peace?

*Paul proclaims from Romans today the source of this peace. This word doesn't come to us with restrictions or conditions. This word from Jesus is one promise. Listen again to **Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** We are not justified; we are not made right with God by making sure we make the right choices in this life. Our peace arrives with the confidence that we are justified by faith. Faith alone. Faith period. Faith without adding any "buts".*

*As I was driving yesterday, I was enjoying some contemporary music from one of my favorite Christian singers on the radio. After the song was done, the announcer proclaimed the words that Paul received from Jesus to preach from this scripture from Romans. He said, "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God." Then he said, **but** now you must act that way. The announcer undid the good news of faith alone with a faith with conditions.*

I hope you find a time of peace today. A little time away from the constant demands of this life in making decisions. A time away from defending your opinions to people who have different opinions. And this peace begins by hearing that you are justified by faith alone. As this season of Pentecost begins, let this promise from Jesus that you are justified by faith alone be good news for you today and give you peace. Amen.

