

“The First Mission Trip”

Matthew 10:5-23

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • June 16, 2013

Quick show of hands, how many of you have been on a cruise? How many of you would *like* to go on a cruise? Last year, thanks to you, Leslie and I went on a cruise for the first time ever. It was seven days of not having to do anything. There were people to take care of anything we wanted. All we had to do was show up and ask.

We were sailing on the *Carnival Magic*, which is one of the largest cruise ships in the world. That boat is 122 feet wide, over a thousand feet long, and is 17 stories tall. The ship carries around 6000 people, including the 1300 crew members. And they will tell you that their primary mission is fun.

I have a friend who told me that his wife has been trying to get him to go on a cruise and he keeps telling her no. He says, “I’ve been on two cruises already.” Except his two cruises were onboard an aircraft carrier as a helicopter pilot. When she says, “it’s different on a cruise,” he responds, “the scenery is the same.”

It turns out that a cruise ship like the *Carnival Magic* is about the same size as a modern aircraft carrier and they carry about the same number of people. But there’s a huge difference between them. The crew of an aircraft carrier can launch a plane about every 25 seconds and every one of the six to eight thousand people on that ship is focused on his or her role in accomplishing the mission of the ship, which is to successfully equip, launch and retrieve aircraft.

For nearly 2000 years the image of a boat or ship has been used by Christians to represent the Church. In fact it’s one of the symbols in our stained glass windows. So the question for today is this: if our church is like a ship, is it more like a cruise ship or an aircraft carrier?

The cruise ship is focused on the customer. The goal on the cruise ship is to keep the customer happy and to keep complaints to a minimum. While we were on the ship, if the food or the service wasn’t up to par, it was our job to let the staff know so they could fix it. Many people these days choose which church they will attend (or whether they will attend at all) based on what the church can “provide” for them. They come to church as a customer and see the church as a “religious services provider.” The cruise ship church spends all of its efforts to keep these customers happy. Whether it’s the music or the message or the cushions on the seats. Everything is focused on making people happy.

The aircraft carrier, on the other hand, is focused on the mission. The goal of every person on the carrier is to successfully complete that mission and every person on board knows his or her role in accomplishing it. It’s the same in the aircraft carrier church. Every person in that church has a role to play in carrying out the mission of the church.

In our passage today we pick up where we left off last week. You will remember that Jesus said, “the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Now we find Jesus not just talking about it but actually sending out the laborers.

Verse 5 says, “These twelve Jesus sent out.” Of course he did. One of the main themes of the Bible is that God is a sending God. In our Old Testament reading God sent Moses to Pharaoh in order to free the people of God from slavery in Egypt. God sent Noah to build the ark. He sent prophets to warn his people. God sent his only Son, Jesus, to free us from sin. Now we

see that he sent the Apostles. And he also sends us. As the New Testament makes clear over and over again, the Church is sent. We are like the forts built out on the frontier. We're supposed to be a mission outpost, kind of like an embassy in a foreign country.

Jesus' disciples had heard him preach the good news, which we studied in the Sermon on the Mount, then they watched him demonstrate his authority by healing people and casting out demons. Now he commissions them to do the same things. Jesus delegates some of his authority to his disciples and he sends them out. He tells them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons. He also gives them very specific instructions about where they are to go (and where they're NOT to go). He says, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

There have been many pastors and commentators who have tried to make this command to be a universal command for all times. I don't think that's what Jesus is saying here. First of all, this is a short mission trip he's sending them on. There simply isn't time to go everywhere. There will be time for that after his resurrection when he commissions them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. At this point he doesn't want them to be distracted. He wants them to focus only on the local area.

But there's also the recurring theme that Jesus says he was sent to Israel. He is their Messiah. Remember, the Jewish nation was God's chosen people. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Later in Romans Paul says that you and I are like wild olive branches that have been grafted

in. It's only natural for Jesus to make it a priority to reach his own people.

Second, Jesus tells the disciples that as they go they are to proclaim that "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." We've talked about this before but I think it's worth repeating. The kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God is not some far away place. It's wherever God's will is done. When we pray the Lord's prayer we say, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done." That's two ways of saying the same thing. This Wednesday evening we're starting a new Bible study that you're encouraged to attend. The study is by Dallas Willard and it's about this idea of the kingdom of heaven. He says, "If you want to go to heaven, now is the time to do it." What he means is that you don't live life here and then when you die you go off to heaven. The kingdom of heaven is all around us. When Jesus came the first time he brought it with him. Anywhere that his will is being done the kingdom of heaven is breaking into our world and you can be a part of it.

The third thing Jesus tells the disciples as he sends them out seems kind of strange to us. He says, "You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food." You may be thinking, "that would be foolish to go off without money or even shoes." And you would be correct. That's not what Jesus is telling them. Basically he's telling stressing the urgency of them going and he's saying, "You don't need to go out and get a bunch of additional stuff to take on this trip. It's more important that you get going. There will be people along the way who will provide for your needs."

Jesus wants them to trust in God to provide. But that means the people of God must do their part as well. He then tells them to find someone who is "worthy" in

each town, someone who will host them while they are there. He also tells them that not everyone will receive them. There will be people who will reject their message and he gives tells them what to do in those situations as well. He says, "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." Shaking out the robes or shaking the dust off their sandals was a sign of contempt. When Jews travelled through Gentile or Samaritan territory they would stop at the border and shake off the dust as a way of showing their contempt. Jesus tells them to do the same thing for the places that reject their message.

The reason is because by rejecting their message about the kingdom of heaven, they are rejecting Jesus the Messiah and therefore they're really rejecting God Himself. To reject Jesus and his message is to reject salvation and forgiveness, which leaves you in your sin and forever separated from God. To drive home the point Jesus says, "it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town." Sodom and Gomorrah were evil cities that were destroyed by God in the time of Abraham. For the ancient Jew they were the worst places anyone could think of. Jesus says the towns that reject him are worse.

The second half of this passage, verses 16-23, are placed here by Matthew because of their subject matter but they're not about this short-term mission trip the Apostles are taking. Instead, as we find in Mark and Luke, these verses are about future missions by the Church. He mentions that the missionaries will be beaten and taken to court and dragged before governors and kings where they will be a witness to the Gentiles. That's exactly what we find happening in the book of Acts, especially

with the Apostle Paul. It's also what happened to Jesus.

He then warns them that the mission of the church is dangerous. He says, "I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves." The people who reject the Gospel will not be friendly. In fact they will be downright hostile. He says that some of the people who will be hostile will be members of our own families, maybe even our parents or our children. Some of you have experienced this yourself. Not everyone is interested in hearing about Christ.

But in the midst of this difficulty Jesus promises that God will be with us. He says, "When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." He also says that when we are persecuted for the Gospel that we should let that motivate us to keep moving and sharing it with others who need to hear. In other words, we shouldn't stick around fighting and arguing with people who reject Jesus.

That's what he means when he says to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. As Christians we are to be shrewd and discerning. We are to be wise in the way we share the Gospel. But we're also to be harmless and pure. Jesus says we're not to do it for personal gain but only to advance the kingdom of heaven. We should reach out in ways that are effective, not trying to trick people into going to heaven but being open and honest with our words and with our lives.

So what kind of church do you want to attend? Do you want this to be a cruise ship church where you expect to be served and for your personal desires to be met? Or do you want to be a part of an aircraft carrier church, a church with a mission where you have a role to play in carrying out that

mission? I truly hope that you want to be part of a church that is focused on telling people the good news of Jesus, a church whose mission is “to know Christ and to make Christ known.” I hope that you will

find your own purpose in helping us to accomplish that mission. And finally, I hope that you see the urgency in getting going. Will you join us?

Amen