

CONVERTING THE CONVERTED - Matthew 9: 35 - 10: 8
Fifth Sunday in Pentecost, June 15, 2008
Calvary Lutheran Church, West Chester, PA + Pastor Roy Almquist

The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a person who is fully and wholly consecrated to him.

The great nineteenth century evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, recalls hearing that claim made by a preacher at a service he attended as a young man. Moody said that **pivotal thought** became the catalyst for transforming his life. When he heard that challenge, Moody made a decision: *I will be that person!* And from that commitment came a lifetime of service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Moody thus became the most significant American evangelist prior to Billy Graham.

Now I have difficulty with some of the teachings of Dwight L. Moody, but I have nothing but admiration for his determination to **lift up the name of Jesus Christ** and call people into a life-changing relationship with the Lord. Like Moody I am convinced that we will never know what God can do with our lives until we agree to surrender our lives in service to the Lord and his kingdom.

Today is Father's Day and, while it is not officially a *Festival* of the Church Year, I think this day reminds us of the unique office and task of fathers. I don't know what *father* means to you. Perhaps you have blessed memories of your father or, hopefully, an ongoing relationship with your dad. Some may have no positive experience of a father or only negative memories. But in our hearts we know what a father should be. **Fathers should love and protect .. fathers should provide and solve problems .. at their best, fathers are champions, mentors, and teachers .. and fathers hold us accountable for our behavior.** Our lives are shaped by those who love us and those who withhold their love from us. **No one plays a greater role in validating that truth than fathers.**

Jesus was not a father, but he had the compassion of a parent as he looked over the crowds that surrounded him. Our Gospel lesson tells us that Jesus looked at the people and saw that they were tossed about by turbulent forces they could not understand or control. **This past week we have seen terrible flood conditions in the Midwest** cause incredible pain for our fellow citizens in Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin. In Jesus' day people were equally disrupted. They were **political pawns** in a Roman world and religion was not a joy but a burden.

In Jesus' day leaders cared little for the people .. much like what we see in Burma today. Matthew cites Jesus as saying that the **people are like sheep without a shepherd**, caught in a tornado of the unexpected.

Matthew tells us: **Jesus had compassion for the people, because they were harassed and helpless.** So he reached out and touched the people .. he **taught them** how they ought to live their lives, he **proclaimed** a Gospel of hope to them, and he **cured their diseases and made them whole.**

Calvary Lutheran Church has a *Mission Statement.* If you have not memorized it, I would hope you have heard: *Give glory to God and share God's love.* That is, more or less, what Jesus told his disciples he wanted them to do. In our Gospel lesson we see Jesus call **The Ill-Equipped Twelve**, who made up the initial core of followers. By any measure they were a **motley crew.. *Matthew the despised tax collector, Thomas the doubter, Peter the trembling rock, Judas the eventual traitor, a bunch of fishermen, and Simon the zealot, another word for terrorist*** .. a stunning group.

Jesus then expressed his concern: *The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.* And then, without much chance to think about it, Jesus sends them out to be his voice and to express his compassion. Matthew tells us that Jesus gave them authority not just to preach but to cast out unclean spirits and bring health and wholeness.

And that, dear friends, is why Calvary Lutheran Church exists ..

- To teach people and help to form their faith so that they can believe in Jesus.
- To proclaim the good news of God's unconditional love for all, even the worst of sinners,
- To effect wholeness and to lead people away from all the many ways in which their lives can be enslaved to demons ... from alcohol, drugs, and gambling, to an obsession with wealth, status, and popularity.

When a person tries to convince others who already agree with him, it is said that person is ***preaching to the choir.*** That statement generally implies that the speaker is doing the unnecessary - like convincing safety experts to wear seat belts or residents of Ocean City to support beachfront protection.

Well, I am not convinced that **preaching to the choir** or trying to **convert the converted** is a pointless exercise. For while most of us have been baptized and church-related for most of our lives, I doubt that we are fulfilling our potential to always be a positive influence on those around us. We are not **fully and wholly consecrated** to the Lord.

In our Gospel lesson we hear Jesus direct his disciples to avoid the Gentiles and Samaritans, the foreign people, but to carry his message **to the lost sheep of the house of**

Israel. This seems a strange contrast to what we generally think was the message of our Lord, but for now, Jesus seems to tell them to **stay local ... convert the converted!**

The Church of Jesus Christ is meant to be an instrument for peace and reconciliation. But how can the Church do that when so many members of the Church have a minimal commitment to Christ's mission and ministry in the world? Is it not possible that the Church must be converted before the Church can convert the world? Isn't it clear that we can call the world to Christ only **if we first call ourselves to a deeper commitment to Jesus Christ and his kingdom?**

- when Calvary or any congregation has less than one-half of its members worshipping regularly, **we must go first to the house of Israel.**
- when Calvary or any congregation counts among its younger families people who assign a higher value to their children's participation in team athletics than their formation in the Christian faith, **we must go first to the house of Israel;**
- when Calvary or any congregation has members who live comfortably, enjoying the good things of life, yet resist the call to responsible stewardship in their lives as reflected in their support for the mission and ministry of the Church, **we must go first to the house of Israel.**

Chester County is our mission field - make no mistake about it. Indeed, the primary mission field of this or any Christian church is the congregation itself. **For nothing stays won** - all of us need to be challenged **to hear the voice of the Lord and respond to him.**

So let us be about the task of witnessing to the Gospel: within our marriages, within our homes, among our fellow members. Let us live lives that proclaim the Gospel by our steady, consistent example.

And finally, let us live into the words of the old hymn of faith that urges ...

**Let none hear you idly saying, "There is nothing I can do."
While the souls of folk are dying and the Master calls for you.
Take the task He gives you gladly, let His work your pleasure be:
Answer quickly when He calleth, "Here am I, send me, send me! AMEN.**

[verse 4, *Hark, The Voice of Jesus Calling* – LBW # 381]