

St. Matthew A.M.E. Church
Bible Study
Monday, November 17, 2008
St. Matthew 10:1-14

There were three distinct phases of Jesus training of His disciples. The first stage, “come and see” was a time when they were just curious converts, gradually exposed by the Master to the nature of ministry. The second stage, “come and follow me” was a foundational time for Jesus to establish His fledgling disciples, immersing them in Scripture study, prayer, witnessing, and fellowship. But at the point of the third stage, “come and be with me” the twelve disciples were ready to strike out on their own. They were no longer just spectator disciples; they were becoming productive disciplemakers.

He sent them on a solo tour of ministry to introduce them to what their task would be like. (St. Matthew 10:1-14) He gave them precise instructions concerning their first solo mission. It consisted of four broad training principles that are still effective today in equipping disciples for disciple making.

1. Send them two by two. When two people are sent out on a job it provides the opportunity to develop closeness, utilize their gifts and develop trusting relationships with one another. Also when there are two working together it diminishes the possibility of competing with each other.
2. Give them authority. Never ask someone to start a task unless you give them the authority to complete the job. Jesus gave His disciples full authority. After authority was given to them it was their responsibility to exercise it.
3. Specify the audience. Jesus clearly instructed His disciples, “do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” This was important because Jesus wanted them to be focused. Often we fail because we are not focused and try to do too much in the beginning. Jesus later would direct them to go “into all the world.” (St. Matthew 28:19)
4. Clarify the objective. Jesus told His disciples, “as you go preach saying, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (St. Matthew 10:7) Having a specific message for a specific target group simplifies the ministry task. Disciples should be able to present the gospel with clarity so that there is no confusing of the issues.

When they return from their solo journey they bring Jesus a ministry report. But it is difficult for them to give the report because of the multitude of people pressing around them. (St. Mark 6:30-31) So Jesus suggests that they go off in a boat to have some solitude and rest. However, they arrive on the shore of another portion of the Sea of Galilee only to discover that the crowd has arrived there before them. But Jesus rather than being frustrated “had compassion on them.” (St. Mark 6:30-34)

Notice what Jesus does. He doesn't just meet the immediate physical and emotional needs of the people but He begins to teach them. Jesus spends a great deal of time teaching because it is by teaching that people come to know the truth. Jesus is committed to truth because He knows that the truth alone will set people free. (St. John 8:32) Wonderful experiences will not set us free. Platitudes, pop psychology and warm emotions will not set us free. Only truth will provide a permanent solution for our needs, and that truth is embodied in Jesus. (St. John 14:6) But Jesus was not only teaching the crowd, more importantly He was in the process of deepening the conviction of the disciples about Him. While He was teaching the crowd, he was deepening the conviction of His own disciples to prepare them for what was before them. Look at what He does.

As it got later in the day, the disciples suggested to the Master another attempt to get away from the crowd. But Jesus knew the crowd was getting hungry. The disciples suggest to Jesus that He send the people away to find their own food. But Jesus said to them, "you give them something to eat." (St. Mark 6:37) Later on they found a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. But Andrew said, "what are these among so many people?" (St. John 6:9)

How many of us have a little or a lot of Andrew in us? We desire to do our best, but our best is so small in light of the massive need around us. We think our little gift to the Lord's work- our little time, talent, or contribution-won't make a difference. But this is not what Jesus wants to hear from His disciples. What He wants to hear is, "this is all we have Lord. But now you take over. Here, Lord, this is all we have, but that's all you ever ask. You can make something out of it, Lord, because a little is a lot in your hands."

Sometime I hear some in the church speak like this, "if only we had more mature leaders in our church, if only we had better singers and musicians.....if only we had more staff.....if only we had more middle class givers.....then our church could really grow and develop." This is the attitude that the Lord wants to rid us of as He deepens our conviction us to make us His disciples. God has not shortchanged His church. His church, including St. Matthew has what it needs right now. The gifts, talents, dollars are already in His church. The problem is that the gifts, talents and dollars reside in the undisciplined congregants who are in our churches. What Jesus wants us to do when faced with the impossible situation is say, "Here Lord, I don't know how to do this, but you do. This is all I have; you take it and multiply it thirtyfold or one hundredfold or one thousandfold."

Jesus took what they had and fed the five thousand. They also had twelve baskets of leftovers, one basket for each of the disciples. (St. Mark 6:43) Can you imagine the look on Andrew's face as he stood there with his basket of leftovers, Peter basking with pride in the Lord or Judas thinking, "I wonder how much I could have gotten for this in town?"

After Jesus took five loaves and two fish and fed five thousand the disciples convictions were deepened and they would never doubt Jesus again, right? Wrong! We would think that Jesus had finished off any doubt in the disciples hearts. But Jesus knew they needed at least one more mind boggling assignment to deepen their convictions.