



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
THE GENERAL CONVENTION

BONNIE ANDERSON, D.D.
PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF DEPUTIES

Sermon – June 15, 2008
St. Michael's and All Angels – Albuquerque, NM Diocese of the Rio Grande
Matthew 9:35-10:8, (9-23)

In the name of the Triune God. Creator, Sanctifier and Redeemer. Amen.

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. Matthew 10:1 - Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment, give without payment Take no gold or silver or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey'Matthew 10:5-10

As we heard this morning, the instructions continue. The charge sounds a bit like Mission Impossible:
- your mission, should you choose to accept it is to: cast out demons, cleanse lepers, cure the sick.

In order to accomplish this mission, first, go to a strange place. Don't take clothes, shoes, or a suitcase (you would not need that anyway, because you will have nothing to put into it). Don't take any money – you won't have any when you leave here and you will not get any along the way. When you have reached your destination, find the wolves and infiltrate them. You will recognize sympathizers, because they won't act like wolves and will give you food and be nice to you. If you misjudge someone and think you are in a safe place, but realize you aren't, get out of there fast – so fast that the dust flies from your feet.

You are equipped with four things of importance to help you in your mission:

One: The power to heal- you have seen how that is done, you have witnessed Jesus doing it, now you do it.

Two: Authority over unclean spirits – stand tall, take a deep breath, remember the serpents and doves for clues to inform your technique.

Three: Rely on each other – all of you are chosen because you are special, faithful and extremely good at what you do.



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Four: Mission Central will always be there somewhere, watching, ready to help and get you through tight situations and help you make the mission successful. Sometimes you will feel like you are completely alone, but you are not. You are never alone. Never.

This morning's gospel story is a teaching on discipleship, yes, but it is also a story about leadership. Jesus' kind of leadership. Because you see, the people that Jesus calls into leadership aren't the usual suspects. Jesus calls ordinary, but often marginalized, people: women, tax collectors, simple fishermen, Samaritans, servants, craftsmen- we know the ones he calls. In fact, we know them so well that we sometimes forget that they were the outcasts and the marginalized. We forget that they were marginalized, because Jesus calls them and gives them his authority. In calling them he widens the circle of authority, he widens the circle of leadership; he creates a circle of redemption.

Jesus, who, seeing the opportunities and challenges, the "plentiful harvest and the few laborers", empowers the people to claim their authority. On face value, it may appear that Jesus is primarily interested in expanding the workforce. But I think it is more about empowerment. I think Jesus wants to give the disciples power. He tells them that they have all they need to do what they are being called to do and then he sends them out. In addition to all that we know him to be, Jesus is the ultimate community organizer.

He calls the disciples together, gives them experiences, identifies the next step and sends them out – together. Be in community, don't do your ministry alone, it is not a solitary act. Community is the context for mission and ministry. You have courage and faith and each other. That's what it takes.

Eric Burtness, in his book, "Leading on Purpose" says, "When Jesus started his ministry, he was very clear about the vision and direction of what he needed to do. ...but in order to do that, Jesus quickly knew that he needed to form a team. Jesus was a team builder. He spent time alone in prayer, but most of his time during his public ministry was spent being surrounded with three distinct teams of people. Jesus closely surrounded himself with an Executive Team -- Peter, James, and John...they were not only the first disciples whom Jesus called but also his closest confidants. Beyond the Executive Team, Jesus surrounded himself with a Core Team, comprised of the twelve disciples. The third team with which Jesus worked was a Missions Team. After he taught his disciples and sent them out, he also trained and taught other missions team of seventy people and sent them out in the same way. They went two by two into the neighboring towns to spread the good news to the surrounding villages of unbelievers.



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Jesus, by word and example, empowered the unclean woman; Jesus by word and example embraced the despised tax collector; he befriended the simple fishermen; he organized and drew together so many people and his community grew so large that on one occasion a hillside was covered with so many people who came to hear and see him that when meal time came around, only a miracle could feed them all.

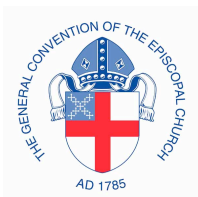
Jesus, the leader, the community organizer, creates communities of people who become connected to each other. Jesus creates communities of disciples, and he asks them to use their God-given gifts to go out among the wolves in his name. Somewhere in the midst of discipleship, the lines become blurry and disciples themselves become leaders with gifts to empower the marginalized in the name of Jesus. Responding to the call to discipleship and leadership takes courage, but we find courage when we witness the courageous and brave acts of others.

Here is a true story of courage: In 1996 this growing parish, St. Michael's, decided to build a new church. They got the promise of a \$350,000 loan from the Diocese of the Rio Grande Investment Board. They needed a new church because they were growing and they had discerned through prayer and conversation that they wanted to actively invite gay and lesbian Christians into community here. They planned and publicized a liturgy of affirmation and reconciliation for gay and lesbian Christians in the Albuquerque community. They wanted to widen the circle.

It was after the ground breaking that the dioceses rescinded the promise of the loan. There would be no \$350,000 loan at 4% interest. There would be no loan at all. A letter from the bishop to the rector expressed "alarm" at the planned liturgy of affirmation and reconciliation for gay and lesbian Christians.

They went ahead with the liturgy of affirmation and reconciliation. St. Michael's did not get the loan from the diocese. After a lot of hard work, they got another loan, one from the "secular" world proving again what Bishop Desmond Tutu says, that there really is no such thing as "secular" as everything comes from God. St. Michael's held a liturgy of affirmation and for gay and lesbian Christians in the greater Albuquerque area. The old church was packed.

Brian Taylor and the people of this parish celebrate today 25 years of leadership—faithful leadership, Gospel leadership, Jesus-type leadership. Today they celebrate 25 years of the kind of leadership that fully embraces a Mission Impossible—the kind of leadership that "takes no prisoners" when it comes to widening the circle, calling in people, (the outcasts, the despised, the marginalized, the confused), lifting them up, and sending them back into the world to do the same - responding to the call to discipleship and leadership with courage and faith and community.



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The sacred space that we find ourselves in today together was built upon the foundation of the kind of courage that comes from exceptional faith and courageous leadership. Here we are, leaders and disciples, organized by Jesus.

Jesus calls us to be lay people and deacons and priests and bishops and he calls us to live our lives in community and he calls us to put all our God-given gifts together, and in so doing, we become more whole.

Jesus brings us together today in a place that was built upon prayer and worship and courageous acts of faith.

Jesus calls us to this sacred place on this remarkable and memorable day, where we are challenged to missions and ministries that take great courage and faith, missions that would seem impossible if we didn't have each other. Jesus calls us and the people of God to gather. And remarkably and rightfully so, Jesus is in our midst.

Amen