

Start at the Beginning
Matthew 9:35-10:8
Rev. Steve McCoy
June 15, 2008
First United Methodist Church
Marquette, MI

Did you ever start get involved in a project that you thought was going to be simple, only to find out halfway into it you were in for a lot more work than you thought? Yeah I never have either! Especially not this past Wednesday. Whether it is the home improvement project that means multiple trips to the store for that one little bolt your missing, or getting 5 bags of mulch when you needed 15 or... well you know the rest. My father went through a similar thing this spring when he bought his new HD TV and was having his satellite installed. They kept blowing out the receiver boxes. So he called an electrician and rather than fixing a circuit, they discovered that the entire house needed to be rewired. But he has a crystal clear picture now.

In his situation the problem was that it wasn't done right the first time. It wasn't age, or anything else, it was that the project was shoddy from the beginning. I have often emphasized when we talk about doing things in the church, that we do them right the first time, because that usually translates into things being done well. When we start at the beginning and do things right, we usually get better results than what we had prepared for in the first place. That isn't to say that things go smoothly all the time, but we get the results we put the effort in to in the beginning.

Today Jesus disciples are given an opportunity to do things right starting at the beginning. He summoned the twelve and assembled them together and he does an amazing thing, he gives them authority. From the very beginning he gives them the authority not permission but authority to cast out unclean spirits, and cure every disease and every sickness. He instructs them to cure the sick raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Start at the beginning.

Today how many of us as members of the body of Christ are doing this. Some are curing the sick of course as we have many in the medical fields here, maybe even a few have had occasion to raise the dead, and even a few more cleansed the "lepers". Have any cast out demons lately? These we are taking literal of course and we should, but there is a deeper issue we must wrestle with as well.

There are many sicknesses in the world which we must address. The sickness of abundance where we have come to believe that the more we can acquire the better off we will be. All of us may fall into that category. Some might be saying: "But I don't have those things like others do. I cannot afford them." That may be true. Others are saying I cannot even have my basic needs met, which may true also. The sickness comes in a society where all of us are led to believe that we

must have all of these things and we will never feel whole or complete until we do. The problem is there is always someone who has more and so we are lead to believe that we need more, when all we need is enough for ourselves and when we find that we have more than enough we are called to give to those who do not.

This sickness has crated a situation in the mainline protestant church, a situation of spiritual death where we have felt like there is nothing that can be offered to us by God, that we cannot get ourselves, that we know better than God how to fulfill. Church membership is declining in the US because of the condition which leads to spiritual death. The death of the soul, where we think that nothing can be accomplished and that we cannot make a difference. So we turn to try to fulfill ourselves.

Some have taken this to heart land literally have gone out into the mission field. While we have life in the United Methodist church in Africa and Asia and Europe. Some ask why is the church growing, because they are staring at the beginning. We are providing, food, clothing, education, fellowship, prayer, connection and relationships that are meeting the basic needs of people who have none. This idea that we need each other to build one another up has caught fire and is spreading throughout the world. Most of the time those missionaries and pastors had no idea what they were getting into. They simply started at the beginning.

The question was asked about this very topic in our last Joel team meeting, is how do we serve people who think they don't need anything? Or think that what the church has to offer is not what they need.

This can result in a spiritual death even in the church when we think we are satisfied with what we have, we just accept the condition that we are in as normal when in fact it is not. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Laborers must go out into the fields to reap that harvest. And so the Disciples are sent out, we are sent out, to cure the sick, raise the dead, and to cast out demons.

We have demons in the church. Now some will think wait a minute where are you going with this pastor? Well I will tell you what I believe the demons are. The demons are apathy, waiting around for someone else to do something, complaining about why no one is doing anything, yet ignoring the call of passion that God has placed on our heart. We become complacent and think this is just how it is. It is not! We all can and should be faithful stewards with all that God has given to us so that we can receive those blessings which build up the church and bring us closer to the kingdom of God. We received without payment to God, so too must we give without payment.

Wayne Barrett of Our United Methodist Foundation was asked a question about when should a church make a decision to go down to a part time pastor. His answer was not what they wanted to hear but cut right to the heart of Jesus

message. That message is to reap the harvest and to give without expectation. He said a church with only ten members if they believe in tithing, can afford a full time pastor. The question you must ask yourselves is what are you willing to give in order to do the things that God would have you do? Many have heard me say it before that we do not have a budget crises in this church but we have a condition of stewardship that must be dealt with so that we do not become spiritually dead. Instead of focusing on whether we have enough to pay the bills, should we not be focusing on how we are able to meet our basic needs which go beyond keeping the building open and paying salaries. The basic needs of the church are to be in mission so that we can use the authority Christ has given us to proclaim the good news to all who will hear, in Marquette and in our State and in our world. In this we have some demons to deal with, but I am confident that Jesus will not allow those demons to overtake us.

Rev. Philip Chance of Dauphin Island United Methodist Church in Alabama shared this story of a conversation with a church member and their pastor about being serious on tithing.

“I heard what you said on Sunday and it made me think about my own stewardship. I guess I agree with you about giving but here is my problem. My income is in the high six-figure range, about \$755,000 a year. If I tithe on that figure I would be giving \$75,500 a year to the church. That’s a lot of money and I’m just not comfortable giving that kind of money to the church.

The pastor responded: “I see your point. That is a lot of money and I want you to remember what else I said about tithing being a return of thanksgiving to God rather than like paying a bill. It’s like thanking God for all that God has been for you. Here’s what I think we ought to do. Let’s get down on our knees and pray together. Let ‘s pray about your tithing issues and lets pray that, since you feel uncomfortable giving a tenth of your income, that \$75,500 is just too much to trust the church with, we’ll pray that God will reduce your income to a level that you are comfortable tithing on.” You can probably guess how the rest of the story goes. But it is worth remembering. When we look at our spiritual condition we must start at the beginning and start with ourselves.

Again this task can seem overwhelming especially with rising gas prices raising food prices rising health care costs, pastor we all may be thinking I am giving all we can. But God calls us to start at the beginning and to look at our habits, and to see where we can readjust our priorities out of the call that God has upon our lives. Whether you believe it or not God has called you to reap the harvest in the fields. God has given us authority to heal the sick, raise the dead, to cast out the demons and to cleanse the lepers. God has called us together as church to be the body of Christ, and to share abundantly with others of what God has already given us. Let us give of our time whether it is through new ministries and missions, or ones we already have to make them better. Let us take the opportunity to do it right the first time and to give with a heart of Joy, trusting that

God will use what we give and use us as God's people to make a difference in the world. There may be rough spots but I am confident that with a good start, we will take our authority as people of God called by Christ, we will proclaim the good news through all we are. May it be so. Amen.