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Sermon of the Opening Worship

Council 2018

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Mathew 10:2-8

² *The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;^[a] ⁴ Simon the Zealot,^[b] and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

⁵ *These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'^[c]*

⁸ ***Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers,^[d] cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay***

Brothers and sisters in Christ!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Greetings from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and from the nation of Ethiopia.

First of all let thank the leadership of the communion for the privilege granted to me to share the word of God at this opening service.

I want to begin this message with some very easy but important questions as far as our context is concerned. Who are we as we gather in this council? Where did we come from? And how did we get here?.

Our text today puts before us what it means to be disciples of Jesus Christ; what it means to be church. Our Lord Jesus Christ sends out his disciples on a mission trip (probably short term mission) with specified activities and specified goals. He was sending them to perform things possible only to the Divine Lord himself. Verse 2 reads, these twelve Jesus sent out—who were they? As the accounts of their calling witness, all these men were from very low status in every way—unlearned, uneducated, unrecognized, and undeserving on every scale. Nevertheless, Jesus commands them to Go and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near, and as you do this, Jesus tells them, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out the demons.

Apparently, this does not sound realistic to the pessimistically bound mentality of our time. Did Jesus really mean it? Were the disciples really able to perform those miracles? Although there isn't any report on this particular mission, nevertheless, we know that they were sent not just as individual humans, but as people armed with authority—they were given authority over those evil images, and evil powers—powers of sickness, powers of death, powers of exclusion , and powers of evil thoughts (Verse 1).

Moreover, it is not so much about the reality of those miracles as it is about the foretaste of the Church's future ministry. While empowering and sending them with such huge tasks, Jesus instructs them not to expect any rewards for the ministry they would be undertaking. Apparently, this introduces a new pattern in the economic

system of the then existed time because a laborer normally deserves a reward. But there is much more to this; it is about the kingdom of God that comes to humanity. To say it differently, it is about God coming to the humankind to give, and to serve, and not to receive.

Brothers and sisters! Participating in the service of this kingdom is pricelessly a blessing, a gift, and a privilege. It is only those to whom the mystery of this kingdom is revealed who would be given the opportunity to share in this blessing. As our Lord declared it, this is a kingdom hidden from the wise and understanding but revealed to the little ones (Math 11:25).

What do all these mean for our context today?

As ministers of his kingdom, we are sent into a crooked world; and as often said a broken world—it is a world filled with unclean thoughts, a world of many kind of sicknesses, a world where many are facing eminent death, a world of social exclusion, a world of injustices—a totally corrupted world. It is to this very world that the Church is sent. In fact, it is to this challenges that this council itself is commissioned. Yes, brothers and sisters, this council is sent out to perform miracles in such a corrupt world in order to proclaim the good news of salvation that addresses all conditions of humanity. But let's be sure, I am not saying we would be miracle workers as some try to practice it these days .

Praise God, as Lutheran Churches, we have all these gifts manifesting when the word of God is faithfully proclaimed and taught; where sacraments are correctly administered, where the people of God gather in worship and prayers.

Miracles also happen when the church reaches out to the needy ones; to the afflicted ones, to the voiceless little ones, and to those denied their God-given humanity.

Isn't this our understanding of mission—"mission as Transformation, mission as Reconciliation, and Mission as Empowerment. If we truly live up to the demands of this understanding of mission—we really would see those commands of our Lord are achieved. Yes, as it happened in the past so will it be in the future because of the authority the Lord has given us.

Participating in the mission of God can never be equated to anything. As those Justified by Grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we each have received everything free from God. That is why we are Christians, and that is why we claim to be Lutherans.

We are the people who were made to be acceptable while we were not acceptable. We were once sick but received healing, once excluded but now placed in the communion of saints, once we were enemies of God but now part of his universal family. These all are the gifts we freely received.

I remember what a faithful brother once said to me after patiently listening to my complaint about busyness in ministry. He wisely and very humbly rebuked me with a question—brother, isn't it a gift to be busy in the house of God; isn't it a privilege; isn't it a blessing to be accepted into his holy ministry. I gratefully treasure those words and will never forget them.

Brothers and sisters, our motivation, our energy and our dedication come from the recognition of the gifts we have freely and abundantly received. I am sure everyone is aware that serving on this council is highly demanding. One might get nervous if not scared. No question, it will take profoundly deep commitment, competence, as well as experiences that many of us might not have. But the great joy is that the Lord will bless us with the spirit of sharing and accompaniment. Everyone in this council is a gift to the other. Therefore, let me invite you brothers and sisters, as the Lord by his grace perfects you day by day, may you also commit to perfecting one another in the service of the Lord.

In conclusion, as we share at this table of our Lord this morning, we are left with one and only one choice in our relationships. That is, accepting one another as the Lord accepted us even when we were not acceptable. Remember, we are always *simul Justus et peccator*. Therefore, brothers and sisters, empowered through the gifts that we share with one another, we shall set out to be embodiments of Christ in this broken world. Freely we have received, and freely we give!

Glory be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

