

Reflection on the Scripture: Matthew 9:35-10:22

[[The video of the reflection.](#)]

But the one who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22). There's a lot the disciples have to endure in this reading about Jesus' disciples being given their first mission. They go out in pairs, it looks like. They go out under-resourced and stay in other people's houses, eating what they're given. They're persecuted by the civil and religious authorities, kicked out of their own families. They're supposed to represent themselves at their trials. All that so they can *cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons* (Matthew 10:8), a fairly high-risk occupation, then and now. For a group of people who are supposed to be *wise as serpents* (Matthew 10:16), this doesn't seem like a smart play. I mean if the Brookline Community Church developed a reputation for walking around barefoot, eating and sleeping at other people's houses, I'm not sure how many folks would rush to Sunday worship. Sign me up, man. And I'm not sure how much advancement you'd see in this world if you decided to take that on as your daily gig.

If you buy my argument that Jesus calls us to live in the real world, why is Jesus asking this of his disciples, then and now? Why is Jesus asking for so much endurance? Well, in part because the core of the disciples' job is to *proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'* (Matthew 10:7). Then and now, that is now an easy message to proclaim or to hear. Not with protests against police brutality generating more videos of police brutality. Not with the details of the economic collapse becoming clearer every day. Not with deaths from Covid-19 beginning to rise in places after a slow decline.

But like many things in Jesus' ministry, there's more happening here than we realize initially. We need to see that Jesus picks his disciples, and not because they have some amazing history or some crazy skills, but because they have problematic histories and no skills. One of the disciples is Matthew the tax collector (Matthew 10:3). Tax collectors in those days had contracts where they would provide a set amount of taxes to the Roman imperial treasury. Whatever additional money they could squeeze out of people, they kept. The people who did the actual collection, like Matthew, were usually desperately poor, taking one of the lowest status and most hated jobs, moving the cash up a chain to wealthier and wealthier individuals. And yet, even as a disciple of Jesus, one of the original twelve, Matthew doesn't get to leave his past behind.¹ He is still Matthew the tax collector, the guy who helped keep the Roman empire in place.

¹ Charles Cousar, "Proper 6: Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23)" in *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A*, ed. Walter Brueggemann et al. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 370.

Another of the disciples is Simon the Cananaean, which doesn't mean he's from Canaan. It means he was a Zealot,² which means he was working to overthrow the Roman Empire's hold on the homeland of Israel. Depending on your perspective, he was a terrorist or a freedom fighter. And he was in violent opposition to Matthew the tax collector.³

So Jesus chose you not in spite of your past, but because of it. Whatever you wanted to leave behind in your past is exactly why Jesus chose you to be a disciple. Whatever from your past puts you in opposition with others who are also disciples, that is exactly why Jesus chose you to be a disciple.

Jesus sends you out as a disciple without walking around money, without any resources, not even a change of underwear. The people you bring the proclamation of kingdom to will feed you and give you a place to sleep for the night. You're to travel light, so light in fact, that it seems like a stiff puff of wind will blow you away. But without all the baggage that might make you independent, here's what you can promise. You can promise that being a follower of Jesus will not make you wealthy or powerful or secure.⁴ You can promise them that they will have nothing at their disposal other than the authority that Jesus will give to them too.⁵ And you can promise them that nothing will hold them back any longer, not even the power of death. Because through you, Jesus is offering them life in the kingdom of God.

Jesus wants to be clear with you, with me, with all of us, that being his disciple, going out into the world to proclaim the kingdom of God is an exercise in rejection. The state will be threatened by people who aren't afraid of its power. The church will be threatened by people who aren't afraid of its condemnation. Your own family will be threatened because you have allegiance to a tribe other than the one you have been born into. Jesus wants you to be clear that if you are rejected, you're probably doing this disciple thing correctly.

And Jesus wants you to endure all that. People you don't agree with. People who are constantly throwing your past in your face and telling you you're unqualified. Jesus wants you to endure not having enough resources to get anything productive done. Jesus wants you to endure rejection on every scale possible, from your nation to your religion to your family. Jesus asks for endurance from you and every other disciple.

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 1: 358.

³ Barclay, 358.

⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, in *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 107.

⁵ Hauerwas, 107.

Because if you can endure, when you see the crowds, you will have compassion for them because they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). If you can endure, they will cease to be harassed and helpless, wearied and laid prostrate⁶ on the ground. Your endurance will allow them to transform into an abundant harvest (Matthew 9:37). You'll see them as flourishing, as vital, as something that brings life to the community, once you see them as Jesus sees them. And that's what they will become. And that kingdom you are proclaiming comes a little nearer.

So endure for just a little longer. Carry your past a little further down the road. Don't worry about the resources you don't have that would make proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom easier. Endure just a bit more as you proclaim and are rejected by everyone. Because *the one who endures to the end will be saved*. (Matthew 10:22) And in your salvation is the salvation of the world.

⁶ Barclay, 355-356.