

**“15 minute sermon”**  
**Rick Carlberg**  
**Salem United Methodist Church**  
**June 18, 2017**

**Scripture Reading: Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8**

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**Sermon title: “12 disciples going solo”**

Our scripture today is all New Testament - Romans, with its assurance of what faith gives us and Matthew, with Jesus sending out the disciples to the Jewish residents of Galilee. In my message today I will focus on the Matthew reading, and then we will cover the Romans, particularly as it applies to us.

So let's set the stage for what Matthew tells us. Jesus is about a year to 18 months into his ministry. John the Baptist is still alive, although in jail. Jesus has his core group of disciples and he has been performing miracles for many months. In chapter 8 - the chapter before our reading today, Jesus heals a leper; he heals the Centurion's servant; he makes Peter's mother feel better by removing her fever; removes demons from 2 men; engages with a paralyzed man, who is able to walk again; raises a ruler's daughter from the dead; heals the woman with a bleeding issue; makes the blind see and the deaf hear, no less than 10 miracles.

Now, I get the impression that while Jesus was sometimes alone when he performed these miracles, most of the time his disciples were with him. They were along for the ride. Who would not want to see miracles performed? Who would not want to hear what Jesus has to say? Who would not want to see the people's reaction to the miracles and ministry of Jesus?

You can just imagine the growing group of disciples - as they went along there were more than the original 12 we are all familiar with. There were dozens, perhaps hundreds, more disciples picked up along the way. This growing swell of people moving from village to village must have been quite a sight to catch the attention of all along their path.

Then one day things change. They fundamentally change. This is where today's scripture begins: After Matthew recaps the miracles, he writes down what Jesus says: “The harvest is

plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Chapter 10 begins, “He called the twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.”

Now, these twelve disciples were very similar to you and me - humble, hardworking people just trying to get through life with dignity, independence and their health. So, how would you feel if you were there, one of those twelve who Jesus called by name?

Some of the thoughts that come to mind include, “Surely you don’t mean me, Jesus?”; “Jesus you must have confused me with brother Sam behind me here - he is much better suited than me”; “Jesus, I really need to get home now - my father has just died and I need to go home to bury him”; “But Jesus, you are so much better than me at this. Why don’t you go?”

In short, Jesus wants to send these 12 out on their own, solo. He instructs them to only go to Jewish communities, so they are at least familiar with the culture. Oh, did I tell you they are only to take the clothes on their back - nothing else is allowed?

You can almost feel the dry mouth each of them may have experienced, the uneasiness of their charge by Jesus. What am I going to say? What am I going to do when I meet a crippled person who asks for healing? You can imagine them having paralyzed legs, not wanting to move forward.

Now, we know that later on, after the resurrection and the great commission talked about by Pastor Keith last week, some of these disciples traveled great distances. Tradition has it for example, that Matthew traveled to India; James went to Spain. It appears that Jesus was giving them a learner’s permit to live and preach the gospel. They were to go locally, relatively speaking, to begin the work that Jesus wants them to do the rest of their lives. [PAUSE]

Although this may sound like a diversion, I will bring it back to our message today. I want to tell you a story that took place almost 14 years ago. It was June 28, 2003 and I was learning to become a private pilot. I was with my instructor, Jim Thompson (the son of the Thompsons, who own the Thompson Strawberry Farm on Hwy 50) in a rented Cessna Skyhawk at Kenosha airport. We had flown together for 19.6 hours, spread over 16 flights, completing 66 take offs and 66 landings - by the way it is very important that the number of take offs equal the number

of landings. I thought I was beginning to get the hang of this, after many less than perfect landings that Jim had to fix at the last moment by taking over the controls.

We stop the plane on the north side of the field. Jim grabs my pilot logbook [hold it up] and makes an entry in it at the back. "OK, he says as he exits the airplane. "Take off and land this plane 3 times. Do it now as there is a storm coming in from the west." Then, Jim walks back to the hanger on the west side of the airport, leaving me all alone in a running Cessna. I remember the dry mouth and my lack of stellar air traffic control requests to taxi to the runway. It went something like, "Kenosha ground, Cessna 2460A is on the north ramp, staying in the pattern, with LIMA", followed up with a broken "this is my first solo". I will never forget the response from Bill (I never knew his last name) in the tower, telling me hesitantly to taxi to runway 6 Left.

After taxiing to runway 6 left I was given permission from the tower to take off. I pushed the throttle forward, accelerated down the runway and lifted off about 70 miles per hour. It was then I looked right and there was no Jim Thompson sitting next to me. I was on my own and had to land the plane on my own. Now, pattern work means you takeoff, make a left turn, then another left turn, then another left turn then a fourth left turn to land on the same runway I just took off from. The first one went OK. I had to taxi back and repeat the process for the second of my three take offs and landings. Once again I was cleared for takeoff, made 3 left turns, but in my last left turn got out of alignment with the runway. With a relative small adjustment I made it back to the runway. I taxied back again, but this time - taxing west - I noticed lightning striking the ground around Paddock Lake - about 8 miles from the airport. The winds changed. I was given permission to take off from 6 left, but had to land on a different runway - a runway perpendicular to mine. So instead of 4 left turns I had to make 3 right turns. After my third right turn I can see lightning striking Bristol, if not Woodworth (just east of Bristol, south of Hwy 50). If that was not exciting enough for me, I am 200 feet too high on my final approach. There is no time for a go around and do this again. By then lightning will be at the airport. I had to get down now. My training kicked in and I performed a maneuver called a "forward slip", which brought my altitude down the extra 200 feet. Somehow I managed to land the plane and taxi back to the west side of the airport. During my taxi to the hangar I hear over the radio the tower close the airport due to lightning in the vicinity. I was the last plane to land before it closed. When I shut down the engine it was pouring with rain and lightning was striking the field. Jim and I are soaked to the skin as we push the plane into the hangar.

Now, the reason I tell this story is this: I only received about 20 hours of flight training before I soloed an aircraft. Yes, there was over 100 hours of book learning, ground school, but under 20 hours in the aircraft. The 12 disciples had many months to more than 1 year of training at the feet of Jesus. God was not going to let anything happen to the 12 disciples, particularly in Galilee and to only the Jewish people. For these 12 individuals to grow in the faith they had to be put on their own - their solo. While not mentioned in the gospels, I suspect some of them were challenged by their own version of the lightning storm - people rejecting them, people threatening them. Their training at the feet of the master got them through this and taught them lessons they would use on their longer, more significant journeys following the resurrection.

Our reading from Romans today discusses the power of faith. It is applicable to the 12 disciples, but also to us. In the first verse we learn lesson #1: faith gives us peace. We have nothing to worry about and it allows us to endure all problems that come our way.

For the disciples that meant the threat of death for spreading the good news. I believe that most people here have seen our presentation of "The 12" know that the majority of the disciples met un-natural deaths. Bartholomew was drowned. Matthew was beheaded. Peter was crucified and so on. They must have had the motivation that only the power of faith can provide. The suffering, endurance, character and hope referred to in our reading from Romans developed in these men. It took the faith in an eternal savior to do so.

Faith is love poured out by our heavenly father. With motivation like that we can move mountains, or in the case of the disciples, start a nursery of new churches around the world. It is that faith, even though we are some 70 generations on, that continues right here in our church. God proved his love for us by sending his son to die on a cross for our sins. That death and resurrection was motivated by God's love for us. Accept it: it is free for the asking. With it comes a peace of mind beyond what we deserve by ourselves.

Now, as United Methodists we are challenged to take action to show the love of Christ in our hearts. Our missions span the globe and also help those who need it in our county. We have supported those less fortunate in South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam. We have fed the less fortunate at the Sharing Center in Trevor and the Shalom Center in Kenosha. Right after church today we are working on Hope Gardens to nurture vegetables to be given away locally.

God does not want us resting on our laurels. What else do we need to do to show the love of Christ in our hearts? Have you called on that elderly neighbor recently? Have you gone shopping for them? Are you looking at your calendar in September when we go to Libertyville to participate in "Feed my starving children"? Our faith emphasizes a personal relationship with God. God has a one on one relationship with us. We act out our faith in personal action as much as community action, through our outreach missions.

[PAUSE]

So, are you ready for your solo? Do you feel confident in the training you have received to do good works as God directs you? Are you ready to handle the unknown situations you are going to encounter along the way? As with the disciples, you can start local with people and places you know. Call on that elderly neighbor. Check in on that friend of yours who is under the weather. Make a difference in this local community.

Build on that confidence and show the love of Christ to all you meet. You will be surprised on how God will direct you, once you make the commitment to be directed by him. One way or another, your actions will demonstrate who you are - a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Amen

**Prayer concerns**

**Collection**

**Hymn 389 - Freely, Freely**

**Benediction:**

Let us go out into the world motivated by the good news that Christ is our new life. Make that first solo. Do not worry, God is with you. Serve others less fortunate. Make someone else's life better. Show the light of Christ that is in your heart to others. May the grace, love and peace of Jesus Christ be with all of you, now and forever. Go in peace, knowing we have a new life in Christ to do his will on Earth. Amen.