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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
The Midweek Liturgy, Wednesday, October 25, 2023  
Matthew 10:5-15, RSV  
Laying Aside Weight

HOLY GOSPEL ..... Matthew 10:5-15, RSV  
*In last week's reading, we read of Jesus's call of the Twelve, including the call of Judas. Now we read of the mission Jesus gives to his Disciples.*

<sup>5</sup>These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup>but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>And preach as you go, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." <sup>8</sup>Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying, give without pay. <sup>9</sup>Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup>no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food. <sup>11</sup>And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart. <sup>12</sup>As you enter the house, salute it. <sup>13</sup>And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup>And if any one will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. <sup>15</sup>Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomor'rah than for that town.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our congregation, Immanuel Lutheran Church, has many advantages. We have inherited them from our ancestors in the faith here at Immanuel, going back to the Civil War. We have a beautiful church building. Who could build a church like this one nowadays? Is there the craftsmanship to build a rear altarpiece like this one, for example? Maybe. But I bet it would cost more than our little congregation could afford. Not only do we have a beautiful church building, but also we have an extraordinary location. We are on the Upper East Side of Manhattan — the only prominent Lutheran Church around in this quarter of our town. We are on the way to the subway. Humanity goes stream by us, waiting to be invited to church. We have a strong history of traditional worship. We have no debt. And we have a pretty good name in the neighborhood. Our community, for example, seems to like our Pastor's Booth. And we do good deeds in our neighborhood, including our Meals on Heels program feeding frail elderly people, like clockwork, every Saturday.

But suppose we lost it all! Suppose we had to go forth from this place with no gold, nor silver, nor copper in our belts, no bag for our journey, nor two

tunics, nor sandals, nor even a staff. That is the discipline Jesus laid upon his Twelve Disciples. He sent them on a mission to proclaim the kingdom of heaven, but their advantages for their mission were sparse. The great thing they had, in my opinion, was the authority of Jesus for the ministry. But we have that authority too. Here in our modern world, Jesus is relentless in giving his mission: We are to make disciples and teach them holy things. We are to win souls to Christ. The great thing about this evening's Bible story is that it lets us see how little we really need in order to do that. We could in fact go out of this place with no gold, no money bag, no extra sandals, and no staff. We could go out pretty barehanded and still be useful to Jesus because no one can deprive us of his great commission:

<sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20, RSV)

Our Lutheran theology supports us in closing the door behind us and heading out to worship in some other, poorer way, if need be. Listen to our Lutheran definition of "the church." We will notice that it speaks not of gold or silver, of old, deep sounding bells, or even of a church building. Rather it speaks of God's Word. This is from our Augsburg Confession, Article 7, "Concerning the Church":

It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. (Kolb-Wengert edition of *The Book of Concord*)

We could rent space in some other church building and still do that. We could still assemble and preach the gospel in a pure way and administer the sacraments with integrity.

So, if worse comes to worst, we could still go on. We could remember the words of the apostle about laying aside every weight and pressing on:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising

the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

<sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (Hebrews 12:1-3, RSV)

We could be like Gideon of old, who according to the instruction of the LORD whittled down his army from 32,000 soldiers all the way to 300 (Judges 7). Even minimal strength is enough if our God be on our side.

But this is all imaginary so far. We have not lost our church or our Endowment Fund or any of our advantages, so far. Still, it is good for us to see how little Jesus actually gave the Twelve Disciples for their mission. If they could do so much with so little, let us turn with renewed commitment to try to do much with the advantages we still have.

Finally, I want to note one more thing about the mission Jesus gave his Disciples. He sent them out into a world that had already shown hostility toward Jesus and which, in the end, would crucify him. Some of his fellow Jews, for example, gave the worst possible interpretation of his healings, claiming the Jesus healed by way of the prince of the demons (Matthew 9:34). Well, be that as it may, Jesus still sent his Disciples out into a world that had shown itself hostile to him. That hostility might endure. It might endure all the way to New York City in these modern times. But be encouraged to think that it shall not endure forever. The kingdom of heaven will indeed come to this old earth. And when it comes, let there be neighbors in our town who are grateful that we introduced them to Jesus during these threescore and ten years granted to them and to us. Let there be neighbors who thank us for helping them to come to Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.