

Matthew 9:35-10:23

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. <sup>36</sup>When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup>therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'

10 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. <sup>2</sup>These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; <sup>3</sup>Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup>Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: '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>As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." <sup>8</sup>Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. <sup>9</sup>Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup>no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. <sup>11</sup>Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. <sup>12</sup>As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup>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>If anyone will not welcome 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 tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

16 'See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup>Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; <sup>18</sup>and you will be dragged

before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup>When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; <sup>20</sup>for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. <sup>21</sup>Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; <sup>22</sup>and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. <sup>23</sup>When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Jesus is more demanding than Satan. Jesus calls his followers to *discipleship*; on the other hand all Satan really asks for is *obedience*. Obedience is far easier than discipleship. Obedience is observable, measurable, and you can tell when you are through. Obedience may be no more than a response to a suggestion or an accommodation that would be easier to do than to think about. It does not even require a relationship with the one who is being obeyed. Sometimes obedience requires energy but it doesn't necessarily require thought. Discipleship is more demanding. It requires constant examination of motives, ongoing communication, and there is no thought of getting finished with discipleship.

This morning's Gospel lesson is nothing less than the beginning of the Church. Up to this point, Jesus was pretty much of a solo act. Now we read that Jesus saw a need for disciples. He needed them because "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them".

Love for his people. That's why Jesus needs disciples. Not "he needed to straighten them out". Not "he needed to make the crowds feel good about themselves." Not "he needed to make sure the crowds would deserve heaven when they died." "When

he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.” That’s why Jesus needs disciples. Any of those other activities are less than discipleship.

Please note how Jesus calls his disciples in this text. We are reading here about the beginning of the Church; this is a good place for us to look if we are to understand the Church we are a part of today. When Jesus had compassion for the crowds, and he saw the need for disciples, the text says he *called* his twelve disciples. (This is the first time that Matthew tells us there were twelve apostles, and he is about to name them.) But, before he even names them, Matthew tells us their qualifications. Jesus *called* his twelve disciples and Jesus *gave them authority* over unclean spirits and power over disease and misery. Then Matthew mentions their names. The real qualifications to be a disciple are that Jesus *calls* you and Jesus gives you *gifts* to use in his service.

**Obedience** is only interested in behavior. All it asks is whether you do what you are told or not. **Discipleship** is interested in *you* and in the gifts *you* have to share.

It is possible that Satan cannot tell the difference; both discipleship and obedience result in the same behavior. The distinction between the two is motivation. Obedience can be forced but discipleship is a voluntary response to love. Love is not familiar territory for Satan and it may confuse him.

Obedience is measured by what you do; discipleship goes all the way down to why you do it. Jesus calls for discipleship, a response to God’s love. Love is profound enough to remain constant even while people’s response to love may be constantly changing. “What we do” cannot be the measure of discipleship, because we are always doing different things as disciples. Quiet meditation and exuberant praise, profligate generosity and careful saving, solitary prayer and communal service are all acts of discipleship even as they represent the full spectrum of behavior. Although the behavior is varied, the motivation is always a response to God’s love. That is why the church has always gotten

into trouble whenever it makes behavior the standard with which to measure Christianity. Behavior changes but the motivation of discipleship remains constant.

If discipleship is lived out in changeable behavior, it parts company with mere obedience pretty quickly. Changing behavior takes thought, deep thought. Changing behavior will not be satisfied with a set of rules; it needs a relationship with a living truth. .

Obedience can be a disciple of Certainty, it cannot be a disciple of God.

Obedience is measured by what we do; Discipleship is measured by whether or not we do it because we love God.

The Church has a record of settling for obedience. We like certainty, and that means we like to be able to measure things. The Church can't measure motivation, so she has sometimes measured behavior.

At various points in history, the Church has allowed the wonderful invitation to live in the love of God degenerate into coming up with minimum requirements for worship attendance so we can measure who is really a disciple and who isn't. When a person is asked if he is a disciple of Jesus Christ, he may not know about the ways his congregation gets to build hope in his community; instead he thinks of the rules he is supposed to obey. The call to generosity has been known to sink into an assessment for a portion of the congregational budget. We can spend our money as an answer to the call to discipleship as we pay for some part of our mission; or we can worry about whether or not everybody else is doing his share. The promise of Holy Communion has sometimes devolved into minimum standards for who may be allowed at the Lord's Table. Instead of delighting in the opportunity to welcome everyone to fellowship with us and with God, the Church has sometimes settled for making a list of rules about who should be allowed to accept Jesus' invitation. These are all examples of enforceable demands for obedience and they all

promise the obedient Christian the security of knowing he or she is keeping the rules. Obedience can be forced with the promise of heaven or the threat of hell.

When the Church thinks obedience is enough it will settle for good behavior and never consider why her members are behaving that way. Even Satan is willing to give straightforward instructions, something as simple as “turn these stones into bread.” In return, Satan promises security — in that famous case it would be something to eat.

Religious leaders who promise security still spring up regularly and they do not lack for followers. A religion based on the security of obedience confidently answers all questions and promises to supply all needs, empower people, and to provide physical safety. Satan has traditionally called for obedience with those promises. He never promised freedom. Freedom is the enemy of obedience. Freedom invites; it does not coerce.

Jesus will not buy our obedience with security; he calls us to discipleship with the offer of his love. He gives us the freedom to act and behave however our relationship with God leads us to act and behave. We are free, but our freedom carries with it an inherent level of insecurity. We have to think, to use our minds, to pray for guidance, to examine our faith, and to sacrifice loyally.

Jesus called for discipleship with the promise of freedom. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32) Knowing truth and being free is a good deal more than fulfilling a set of minimum requirements. It is the life of a disciple.

Discipleship demands more than mere obedience. It requires every aspect of the life God has created and entrusted to his children. As God’s love is constant, the response of discipleship is also constant. Obedience can be accomplished with a personal choice. Discipleship requires a response to the love of God.