

Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

⁸ **These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹ And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.”**

¹² **They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.** (NIV 84)

Theme: Our privilege as Christians: to share the Word with others.

1. According to Christ’s command
2. With Christ’s power.
3. By Christ’s blessing.

How long should someone be trained before they share the gospel with someone else? Jesus was in the third year of his ministry when he called the disciples to him in our text for today. They had been following him around as his pupils for two-plus years. They learned God’s Word from him; they knew that he was the Promised Messiah, who had come down from heaven to be pay for the sins of the whole world.

They were with Jesus as he went throughout Judea and beyond preaching the gospel and performing miracle. But now it was time for the disciples to do just that. So he sent them out in pairs to go throughout the land and preach the gospel. Although the Lord was their teacher, they still only had two-plus years of instruction; I’m sure some of them were nervous and felt ill-prepared.

In the WELS pastors are trained for essentially eight years before they are called by a congregation—that is four years at college at MLC, three years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and another year are a vicar while at the seminary.

There are many good reasons why our pastors go to school for this long. We want them to be theologians—to know the intricacies of God’s Word; to preach and teach it in truth and purity; to be able to explain Christian doctrine; to recognize a false teaching and to be able

to refute those false teachings. They are taught how to watch over their spiritual lives of the sheep under their care—to administer the sacraments properly; to use the keys; and to share the gospel to those throughout their communities and beyond. We could go on and on, but you get the point: there are many good reasons why we invest eight years into training our pastors.

But we may use this blessing as an excuse. There is a tendency by some lay members to think that since they have such qualified pastors that they don’t have to do any work themselves. I’ve been told on more than one occasion when talking about spreading the gospel, or visiting a delinquent, or handing out door hangers before Easter, “Pastor, that’s what we have you for; we pay you for a reason, don’t we?” Or some may think, “I haven’t been trained for eight years; I don’t know God’s Word well at all compared to my pastor; why should I share the gospel, when my pastor is much better at it than me? What if I say something wrong or make a mess of things?”

Did Jesus know the law and gospel better than the disciples (not that any pastor is worthy of being compared to Jesus)? Of course, but he still sent out his disciples—and not just to train them; but so that they could reach more people with the gospel. In the fourth chapter to his letter to the Ephesians Paul points out that Christ calls pastors and teachers, **to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.**

We train pastors for eight years not to do the work of the gospel alone. The Lord blesses us with pastors to lead, teach, and oversee the body of believers to do the work themselves. And part of the work of the Lord is to share his Word with others. That is our duty and privilege as God’s Children—we get to tell others about the one who took the world’s sins upon himself; who suffered the eternal damnation the world deserved as he was forsaken by the Father; who gave us his perfect life; and the victory over death through his resurrection. It is the Lord’s command for us to share this great message to all people.

When Jesus sent out his disciples he didn’t send them with any amount of money or other provisions. This was so that they would trust in Christ to lead his people to take care of them. And so that they would trust in him and his power he also gave them authority over evil spirits and the power to heal sicknesses and disease.

Because Jesus gave power over demons and the power to heal diseases to his disciples there are some who still even today think that God still gives such gifts to his people. They believe that some are given special gifts that enable them to show impressive power. They claim to be faith healers. Or there are some who claim that God speaks directly to them and even go as far as to say that God heals from cancer those who attend their congregation.

But God makes no such promise. There is no promise from Christ that he would continue to give power over demons and power to heal sicknesses and diseases to his Church. And there is no legitimate evidence that he does so.

But we don't need it anyway. Christ has given us something greater—his Holy Word. It is this Word which the Writer to the Hebrews describes as, **Living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.** In Isaiah the Lord says about his Word, **It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.** With the power of the Holy Spirit working through this Word we have all we need so that others may believe and be saved. By his grace the Lord has made this Word readily available to us at all times.

But the power and effectiveness doesn't come from those sharing the Word with others; it comes from the Word and the Holy Spirit working through the Word. We can at times be mistaken by thinking that we can somehow add to the power of the gospel. That if we are charismatic and personable and funny and so on that we can be better and more effective preachers of the gospel; and that more people would come to believe. It's hard for us to trust that the Word works—we don't have to add or subtract anything to it to make it more attractive or effective—we are tempted all the time to change this or that about God's Word to make it better or less offensive in the hopes that more would believe.

The power of the gospel to bring someone to faith doesn't stem from the person preaching it but from the Holy Spirit. There is nothing about the one who shares the gospel—whether a pastor a lay member, that can make someone believe more. There is nothing we can do to add to its power and effectiveness. You can't add to the message of free forgiveness through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and victory over death through his resurrection. The power of the gospel comes only from the Holy Spirit working through that gospel and the

pure Word; and so we only share all of Word with others and let the Holy Spirit do his work and bring many to faith.

And as you go out and share this gospel with others, how do you go about measuring success? Is it by the number of people willing to listen to you? Or the percentage of people who attend worship with you when you invite them? Or the number of new members we get each year? And if so, what number or percentage do you have to attain in order to consider your sharing of the gospel a success? Many people label success in terms of numbers. Is our membership going up or down; what about our worship attendance? Are we growing as much as the congregation down the street? Or what about the numbers of the synod? Are we growing as fast as the Missouri Synod, or some other denomination? And if those numbers are going down or are not increasing the way we want them to increase then we may have the tendency to ask: what can we do to become more effective? Or what can we do to bring in more members? While looking at such numbers can be useful; they are not a great indication of success; numbers are not the be-all and end-all.

Numbers can be deceiving: The gospel is foolishness to unbelievers and Scripture is contrary to reason and science so people are always going to reject the pure Word. Plus, the devil isn't trying to hinder false teachers. He hates the gospel; but he loves everything that goes against God's Word. The reason why the mega church or that other denomination is growing by leaps and bound is often because the gospel might not be found there; they are churches free from any sort of doctrine or anything that might give any offense to anyone; and so the devil builds a highway instead of a wall. Numbers cannot determine success.

When Jesus sent out his disciples he didn't give them an ultimatum or a number. He didn't say you must bring a dozen people to faith in each town per disciple. He didn't give them a scale of success or give them an effectiveness rating based on how big the following was in each town. We never hear the results of their work. He simply sent them out with a message of repentance—a message of law and gospel, to turn from their sins and trusting in themselves to Christ, their Lord and Savior. He said to them, **if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.** And notice how there is no mention there

that if a town did reject them that they ineffective preachers of the Word.

Or consider Jesus. If we would have used the Pentecost Seven readings last week we would have seen that Jesus' was rejected his hometown of Nazareth. Would you consider him a failure? Would you say that he wasn't an effective enough? No, of course not, that is absurd.

Or take a look at Amos from our first lesson today. Notice first of all that Amos wasn't specially trained; he wasn't a prophet or a son of a prophet—or to put it in today's language, "he wasn't a called worker, or the son of a called worker." He was a shepherd who also took care of trees and yet God still called him to be a prophet. And no one listened to the warning of this shepherd-prophet. Amaziah, a so-called priest of God, even opposed Amos.

So success isn't measured by results. Success is measured by faithfulness. Were you faithful in sharing God's Word in every opportunity or not? Were you faithful to all of God's Word, and not just the non-offensive portions? Amos can be labeled as a success just as Jesus can—and you and I can: they were faithful to the spread of all of God's Word.

When we think back to all the opportunities to share the Word with someone that we have let slip-by we realize that aren't all that faithful; and there will be many times in the future that we may not stand up and defend the truth as we ought. That's why it's so important not to lose sight of the one who sent out the disciples and what he did. Christ was always faithful to his Word. His righteous life is yours for he went to the cross for you. Upon his shoulders he placed your lack of trust, your failures to speak His word faithfully and boldly, and every other sin; and he was forsaken by the Father and suffered your eternal punishment. By his death your sins have been removed. Eternal life, free from sin; awaits you in heaven because your Savior defeated death by his resurrection. For all your sins and the sins of all Jesus shed his blood and died. We have good news that never gets old or spoils, the message of free salvation, which leads you to share the message with others.

You don't have to go to school for eight years in order to tell someone about their Savior—that is something you and everyone child of Christ can do—it is our privilege and responsibility. And when we are

faithful to the Word of God and faithful in sharing the Word the Lord will bless his work through you. Amen.