

Albany Presbyterian Church
June 14th 2026 Matthew 9:35-10:8

We all remember sitting at the airport, watching people arrive at the gates with their carry-on bags, some with friends or family, some alone, waiting for the announcement to board the plane. This seemingly mindless moment, tinged with excitement or dread, brings you together with a single common purpose: to be on that plane.

I wonder what the experience was like for the people in the book of Exodus. The Israelites had once been enslaved in Egypt, and now, in the desert, some are journeying with friends and family, while others are alone. They are leaving their life in Egypt behind to explore the wilderness. Everyone follows Prophet Moses, who was more than just a prophet—he was a leader, a miracle worker, and a mediator between them and God. God had promised them a land of milk and honey, a land of freedom.

It has been about three months since they left Egypt. Now, they were no longer defined by their status in Egypt as slaves, the forsaken and forgotten. Standing at the foot of the mountain where it all began, where God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, God speaks to them about their new identity, defined by their relationship with God, freed and carried. They were the sons of Jacob. They are no longer nobody; they are the treasure of God. In verse 4 of Exodus 19, God says, “You saw what I did to Egypt” and “I bore you on the wings of eagles”, rescuing them from the power and oppression of Egypt. God demands their freedom. He demonstrated his power and authority through the plagues of blood, frogs, lice, flies, pestilence, diseases, locusts, darkness, and death.

And God says, “I brought you to me.” In other words, it was God who showed mercy and grace, so that we have not earned his mercy and love. And this is what true grace is. God shows his love first and has mercy even when we do not deserve his mercy. And in verse 5, he says, “If you will truly hear my voice and keep my covenant.” God says, “You will be a special treasure.” “You will become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Given what’s going on in the world, Israel’s role in the current geopolitical and military situation, and developments in Iran and the Middle East, I wonder what it means for them to be a priestly nation and a holy nation.

This story of grace in the Exodus reading reminds us that they were called to serve and not to a status. Certainly, it is not for one nation to indulge in selfish, nationalist pride and a sense of superiority.

This is why most of us have struggled with the doctrine of election, where one is chosen and others are not. One is the elect, and the rest are reprobates.

The purpose of God’s blessing on the people of Israel was that, through Israel, God would be glorified. For they were meant to be priests. What does a priest do? A priest serves as a mediator between God and humanity; they offer worship, teach the way of God, hold sacred space for people, and intercede for them. So, God’s salvation will be for all, so that all may know and see the splendours of God’s greatness and love. And as the elders and the tribes of Israel were called before the Lord, they committed to follow God and to do “everything that the Lord has spoken.” Altogether, as a people, they accepted God’s command and promised to live God’s way.

This was perhaps why Jesus sent his disciples, instructing them to go specifically to the people of Israel. This covenant in Exodus has been carried forward into the ministry of Jesus, his disciples, and those who came after.

Earlier in Matthew, Jesus sends out his disciples. In Matthew 9, we are told that Jesus moves through towns and villages, teaching in synagogues, healing people of every disease, and sending people free from evil. According to Matthew, as Jesus moves through the villages and towns of Judah, he feels great sadness; he is moved with compassion for people. In verse 36, Jesus saw them, weary and harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus was moved with compassion for people, seeing their suffering, their lostness, and their need for leadership and care. People seemed to have lost their way. Their leaders, the teachers, priests, and high priests, failed to lead the people on the path of truth and freedom.

And so, they came out in thousands, longing to hear the gospel, the message of hope, guidance and salvation; they hungered and thirsted to be healed and set free. They came night and day, stayed with him every day until very late.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

And with this, Jesus sends his disciples, who now become the ones sent, also called the apostles. It reminds me of the story of 70 elders, the expansion of the ministry beyond one person.

And even this early in his ministry, Jesus sends his disciples out, giving them the authority and power to teach the way of the Lord, to drive out evil spirits, to heal every disease, and to minister the gospel of salvation to all.

This call to the disciples was direct and practical, being empowered by God and ministering with the authority of Jesus.

What is it to us? How do we relate this story of Israel and the story of Jesus and his disciples, reading it as the story for all of us today? If we see ourselves also as God's chosen people, his treasure, a kingdom of his priests, and a holy nation. We also see ourselves in the disciples, the ones that Jesus sent, how are they us, their story, our story.

Firstly, if we are the chosen people, we are also set apart for a purpose. To serve God as a priest, to be faithful to serve God as go-between, our lives and our worship be reflecting God's love and compassion, mercy and truth. If we are the apostles, the ones Jesus sent to our villages and towns, we also know and experience the mercy of God and feel the compassion Jesus felt when he saw people, even in our world, and for the weary and scattered.

Secondly, our calling is not a status but an invitation to serve. Israel was a slave when God showed mercy and rescued them from Egypt. God made them who they are, his treasure, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Like us, the twelve were ordinary people, not particularly pious or knowledgeable. Not perfect, far from it. The twelve apostles, Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew (also called Nathanael), Thomas, Matthew the tax collector, James (son of Zebedee), Labbeus, Thaddaeus (also known as Jude), Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus. Most of them were fishermen—young, uneducated, poor, and simple labourers—far from sophisticated or wise.

Jesus calls the ordinary people who have nothing but enthusiasm and respond to Jesus with urgency, with willingness, and total obedience.

As someone says, God does not call the equipped and prepared. God calls, equips, and prepares the one He calls.

Lastly, Christ calls us to the ministry of wholeness and healing.

As C. S. Lewis said, Christian faith is not just about passively escaping reality; it is about actively striving for goodness and improving the world around them, guided by the ultimate reality of God.

Faith is active participation in God's mission, the ministry of Jesus, the work of healing, restoration and justice. "Go", as Jesus sent the twelve, Jesus sends us. Preach the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

16th century mystic Teresa of Avila said: "Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours, yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world, yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world."

On my way back home, I spent a few hours at Incheon Airport. It has 121 active gates. More than 70,000 employees work there, including airline staff, retail workers, security personnel, ground and cargo handlers, pilots, flight attendants, and customer service agents, all dedicated to transporting passengers. About 240,000 people pass through the airport daily, most heading to their destinations. Somewhere in this, we are called. We are the chosen; we are sent; God has blessed us; Jesus empowers us; we have work to do.