

"SAVED TO SERVE"

(Matthew 9:35-10:1)

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[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) "The Potter and the Clay" Video Clip; (#2) Beautiful Pottery display on altar, including Holy Communion pitcher, plates and goblets]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 5-7-23]

--I--

1. [11am ONLY... Read Text: Matthew 9:35-10:1 and Pray]
2. [WATCH VIDEO: "*The Potter & the Clay*" (Time: 2:00) from Sermonspice.com]
3. Here on our altar table we have a beautiful display of various pieces of hand-crafted pottery, each created with skill and precision by a potter out of the "*squishy, gooey, simple clay*" described in the video we just saw.
4. Now, many of us have created clay projects before -- perhaps a long time ago in school (although they may not have turned out as nice as these!).

A--But whether it was us or someone else, a potter is someone who takes clay and forms it into something he/she desires -- yet, for that to happen, it has to have the right consistency... soft and pliable enough to be able to be shaped, yet stable enough to be able to hold and retain that shape during drying.

B--Of course, after the pottery dries, it still has to be decorated. So, the potter applies a special kind of paint called "glaze" that adheres to and protects the clay.

C--And then finally, as a way of permanently "setting" the clay in its form, the potter sets the piece in an oven called a kiln, and heats it up to between 2000-2500 degrees Fahrenheit for about 5-6 hours. ¹

D--And after it finishes baking and is taken out and cools down, the end result is a beautiful piece of pottery... like the ones we have here on the altar table.

5. But here's my question for today: Is pottery such as this created merely to be beautiful and to look at? Or was it created for something more?

--II--

6. Today's scripture reading from Matthew 9-10 actually speaks about this.

[9am ONLY... Listen to what it has to say... "*9:35 Jesus traveled among all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, announcing the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. 36 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, 'The size of the harvest is bigger*

than you can imagine, but there are few workers. 38 Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest.' 10:1 He called his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to throw them out and to heal every disease and every sickness."]

A--[**BOTH services...**] Bear in mind that Jesus' disciples had already been following him for a while. Verses 35 & 36 remind us that they'd heard him teach and preach, cure sickness & disease, & they'd experienced his compassion & love for others firsthand.

B--In a sense, we could say that -- like the potter's clay -- these disciples had been shaped, glazed and even baked into followers who would take on the form and beauty given them by *their* Master Potter, Jesus.

C--Yet, I want us to notice that after all this time with Jesus, learning to be like him and to reflect him in their own lives, Jesus says something startling beginning in Verse 37:
"The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest.' [So] he called his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to throw them out and to heal every disease and every sickness."

7. Do you see what Jesus is doing here? First, he's calling the disciples' attention to the great needs and cares of the world around them. But then he's showing them that *they themselves* are the *answer* to those very needs and cares.

A--He's essentially saying, *"Look, you fellows have been watching ME teach and preach and minister to people for a while. And in so doing, I've been giving you an example and model of what true ministry is. But now I want YOU to go do it yourself -- I want YOU to go and BE and DO for the world what I have created you to be and do."*

B--Jesus is saying to them, I think, what he'd say to any who follow him: that we are NOT called to a life *privilege by* God, but to a life of *responsibility for* God.

C--He's reminding them (and us) that the things HE did -- things like teaching & sharing the good news of God, and healing the sick and diseased, and having compassion on those who are (as Verse 36 says) *"troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"*-- those are the things his followers are to now go out into the world & DO!²

8. Think back to our beautiful pieces of pottery here. As I hinted at earlier, these weren't created just to sit on a shelf (or even an altar) and look pretty. Yes, they're definitely beautiful. But that's not WHY they were created.

A--No. When a potter creates a piece of pottery, he or she expects that it will be *used* for the purpose for which it was created.

B--And just as pottery is made to used for a specific purpose, so God (our heavenly "Potter") created and gave to you and I talents, gifts, and abilities that He intends for us to *USE* for His glory and kingdom.

C--In the words of the apostle Paul, "*We [humans] are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives*" (Ephesians 2:10, CEB).

1--In other words, like our pottery here, we Christians weren't made just to "look pretty" at church, but to allow ourselves to be *used* by God in our world.

2--We were made to *BE* Jesus to those around us -- our "*good works*" (which point others to God) are the "*the way we live our lives*" which we were created to have and live by.

3--...That as Christians, we're not called to some private relationship *with* God, but to special tasks and work *on behalf of* God -- that we are (in the words of today's title) "*SAVED TO SERVE.*"³

--III--

9. So let me simply ask: How are YOU living out your faith in Jesus Christ?

A--Are you doing *your part* to... "*throw out*" the "*unclean spirits*" of our world, and help to "*heal every disease and every sickness*" (whether that be racism, prejudice, fear, selfishness, pride, addiction, or something else)?

B--OR...are you just a "pretty Christian," sitting passively on a shelf (or in a pew/chair watching online) somewhere?

C--Sure, it's great for us each week to be able to worship and pray for God to meet all the hurts and needs of our world.

1--But *inside* the church (whether as a building or even online) is NOT where the church is called to do its work!

2--No. As today's scripture tells us, the "harvest" that the church is called to give attention to exists *OUTSIDE our buildings* and *IN* our community and world.

D--That's why I'm so thankful for ministries here at Cornerstone like our O'Rourke Ministries, Trinity Table, Operation Christmas Child, our El Salvador mission, our annual Vacation Bible School.

1--All of these (and others) provide us as Christians with outlets and opportunities to serve the needs of others in our world --...

2--...to be able to fulfill the vows we made to God when we became members of this church, saying that we would love God through our church as we support it by our Prayers, Presence, and our Gifts, but also through our "*SERVICE.*"

10. So, how are YOU serving God by serving others? Is it by helping out in one of these ministries I've already mentioned? or perhaps by volunteering to serve as a usher, greeter, or as part of our Audio-Visual ministry? by singing/playing in our choir or praise team? by being a children's or youth ministry volunteer?
(If you need help discerning where you can serve, contact me or any staff member)
11. Whatever it is, today's invitation is a reminder of our call to serve God by serving our fellow human beings -- for us to remember that we are "**SAVED TO SERVE**."
12. How are YOU fulfilling the purpose for which you were created? How are you serving God by serving others?
13. [PRAYER and HOLY COMMUNION]
14. [CLOSING SONG]

ENDNOTES:

¹ The process of making pottery is described in the article "How Pottery Is Made" by Nancy EV Bryk at the website <http://www.madehow.com/Volume-4/Pottery.html>

² Notice, too, in Chapter 10:2-4 *who* these disciples were that were sent out... *not* professional "clergy" with years of experience and academic training, but everyday people... tax collectors, fishermen, even a political zealot. They were *ordinary* people called to the *extraordinary* task of sharing God in Christ with the entire world.

³ Along this same lines, I've heard someone say, "*We're not called just to 'make a difference' in our world, but instead to 'BE the difference' in our world*" -- that "*We're not called to 'change our community,' but to 'BE the change of our community'*"-- that as Christians, "*We're not called to 'take Jesus to the world,' are instead called to 'BE Jesus to our world.'*"