

Sermon for June 18, 2023 - Third Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 9:35-10:8 EHV

Theme: Jesus' compassion for the crowds

- 1) Invites us to pray for ministers of the Gospel.
- 2) Moves Him to send ministers of the Gospel.

³⁵ *Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness.* ³⁶ *When he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were troubled and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd.* ³⁷ *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.* ³⁸ *Therefore pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest."* ¹ *Jesus called his twelve disciples to himself and gave them authority to drive out unclean spirits and to heal every disease and every sickness.* ² *These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.* ⁵ *Jesus sent these twelve out and commanded them, "Do not go among the Gentiles, and do not enter any town of the Samaritans.* ⁶ *Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* ⁷ *As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near!'* ⁸ *Heal the sick. Raise the dead. Cleanse lepers. Drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.*

What thoughts come to your mind when you consider the state of our society? Do you see only obstacles arising trying to prevent you from exercising your faith? Do you think people are so helplessly blind to the truth that you've given up all hope for their conversion? I wish I could say I don't think that way, but I sadly confess that I sometimes do.

In our sermon text, Jesus calls us to think differently about the people of our world – so much so that our fearful attitudes and actions can't help but change. Let us consider how **Jesus' compassion for the crowds**: 1) Invites us to pray for ministers of the Gospel. 2) Moves Him to send ministers of the Gospel.

Part One: Jesus' compassion for the crowds invites us to pray for ministers of the Gospel.

Our sermon text took place during Jesus' Galilean ministry. ³⁵ *Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness.*

Why did Jesus go from town to town throughout Galilee? To preach "the gospel of the kingdom." "What is that?" you might ask. It's the good news that he is the divine Son of God, who has come to destroy the devil's work. How? By forgiving all sin and reuniting us with God the Father. Christ's kingdom is his gracious rule in our hearts through the Gospel. Through this Gospel, he not only gives us the gift of everlasting life, but he also changes our attitudes and action concerning

our life on earth to such a degree that we no longer want to pursue sin, but serve him in love and gratitude for all he has done.

Jesus' primary mission has always been to save souls from sin. This is why: ³⁶ *When he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were troubled and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd.*

Even though the crowds that surrounded Jesus lived in a different time, place, and culture than us, they nevertheless faced many of the same issues we face. Financial hardships, disease, mental anguish, genetic disorders, demonic influences, questions about identity, pride, worries about war, crime, guilt, and shame over sin – none of these things are new. These issues troubled the people in Jesus' day just as they trouble us today. The problems only looked a little different because their culture was different.

Worse yet, their religious leaders (Israel's "shepherds") did nothing to help. They only made matters worse. How so? The Sadducees taught that it was ok to question God's Word. The Pharisees taught that people couldn't gain heaven without doing all sorts of works. Their government leaders were immoral and corrupt. Is it any wonder that Jesus considered the people downcast sheep without a shepherd? No one taught them the truth about God's love and the coming Saviour.

But Jesus had compassion for these people. He came to destroy the devil's work. He came to rescue them from their sins. He came that they might have life and have it to the full.¹ There was now no reason for them to live in hopelessness and slip into destruction.

Therefore, *he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.*

What did Jesus see when he looked out at the crowds? Not problems, but an opportunity. He saw a harvest of souls waiting to be picked. But, just as an army of workers is needed to harvest a large, ripe field of fruit, Jesus perceived an army of workers was required to gather all the lost souls he elected to save for his kingdom.

³⁸ *Therefore pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest,"* Jesus commanded his disciples. Pray - not just once, but continually. He wanted his disciples to see with his eyes and feel with his heart for the crowds that surrounded them, for only the LORD himself could call, train, equip, and send the workers needed to gather the ripe harvest of souls that lay before him.

Brothers and sisters, what our Saviour desired for his disciples of yesteryear, he also wants for you. Don't view the crowds around you as a hindrance to the exercise of your faith; instead, see them as an opportunity to practice it. We life-long Christians can easily forget how it feels to be utterly hopeless without a Saviour. Because this is the case, we often put off sharing the Gospel with our family, friends, and acquaintances for another day. When we see how our society is going, we may be tempted to ask God to send judgment rather than a Saviour.

But Christ invites us to look again with his eyes and heart. The people around us who are so vocal in their sins of pride and immorality are on a path to destruction. They think they are doing the right thing, but they are ignorant. They don't perceive the demonic forces that are driving them. They think they know what Christianity is about, but they don't. Why not? Because, like the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day, most mainline Christian churches don't actually preach Christ. Sure, they may claim to follow him (just as the religious leaders in Jesus' day claimed to follow the LORD), but they don't preach him. Instead, they point people to their deeds and feelings to guide them – not understanding that the way that seems right to a person will only result in death.

Yes, our world desperately needs faithful servants of Christ, which is why Jesus invites you to pray for them - not just once, but continually. And, as you pray, think about how you can support worker training. How? By encouraging gifted men and women to pursue ministry. Tell them how faithful ministers of the Gospel impacted you or the people you love. And then, when the opportunity arises, support the ministry – not only with your offerings but with your time and talents. If God so moves in your heart, prayerfully ask the LORD if you can be a pastor, teacher, or staff minister. There are many second-career men and women in our Church's ministry – of whom Pastor Goetzinger is a prime example. Who's to say you cannot be one too? But even if the public ministry is not for you, think about ways you can support it with other acts of service.

Yes, Jesus' great compassion for the crowds invites us to pray for more ministers of the Gospel – especially as we see the great need surrounding us. Let us now consider how he answers our prayers.

Part Two: Jesus' compassion for the crowds Moves Him to send ministers of the Gospel.

¹ Jesus called his twelve disciples to himself and gave them authority to drive out unclean spirits and to heal every disease and every sickness... ⁵ Jesus sent these twelve out and commanded them, "Do not go among the Gentiles, and do not enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near!' ⁸ Heal the sick. Raise the dead. Cleanse lepers. Drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Jesus answered the prayer of his disciples by sending twelve unique individuals that he chose for a particular purpose. Before I go on, I need to address the elephant in the room: if God gave the Twelve Apostles the power to do miracles, why doesn't God do the same through pastors and teachers today? My answer: while pastors, teachers, and apostles are all forms of public ministry, they don't all have the same job. Think of it this way: just as a construction company doesn't equip every one of its workers on a job site with their own bulldozer and backhoe, but select people as needed, so also Jesus does not grant miraculous gifts of healing to every public minister either. They were given at a specific time for a particular purpose.

Therefore, even though many specifics of our sermon text may not apply to public ministers today, the general pattern of Jesus, calling, equipping, and sending does.

Note that public ministers don't "choose" their occupation. No, the LORD calls them – just as he called the Twelve in our text to service. How does it happen? Well, just as (at a much earlier time) Jesus gathered the disciples to learn from him before sending them out, so Jesus uses the encouragement of fellow Christians to gather men and women to be his students today. Why? So, they can spend time learning from him as they study the Bible in depth at our worker training schools. Jesus wants his future public ministers to grow in understanding of who He is, His mission, and His kingdom.

Then, when the time is right, the LORD sets them apart again – just like he set aside the Twelve in our sermon text– and gives them the authority to represent him. How does the LORD do that today? Through His Church, the Holy Spirit leads a congregation to call a minister of the Gospel to serve them.

And, just as the Apostles' call in our text was very specific – limited to serving the lost sheep of Israel for a particular time – so the LORD calls his servants today to serve at a certain time and place for his specific purpose.

And just as each of the Twelve disciples had unique experiences, personalities, and talents that the LORD used in his kingdom, so does each minister of the Gospel today. Why? Because, just as each tool in a toolbox serves a specific purpose in the hands of a craftsman, every minister of the Gospel serves a particular purpose in the hands of the LORD, who uses that minister in his kingdom.

And just as Jesus gave his Twelve authority to represent him – giving them the very message they were to proclaim, so Jesus places his authority on all ministers of the Gospel today – regardless if they be pastors, teachers, missionaries, or staff ministers. Even though ministers of the Gospel are sinners just like us, God has chosen them to speak His Word in his place. And He wants us to listen to them as they speak His Word – showing them the same respect we would show Jesus. Why? Because they come to you with the Gospel of the kingdom: the same message Jesus himself used to change the hearts and minds of the people in Galilee. God promises His Spirit is at work wherever they preach and teach His Word. He is present with them – working a wonder that is more fantastic than raising the physically dead or healing the sick. What miracle is that? The miracle of repentance and faith. Through the proclamation of His Word, the Holy Spirit raises the spiritually dead to spiritual life. He awakens faith and hope in the heart of an individual – forgiving all sin and granting everlasting life to all who believe.

I know that that miracle doesn't seem all that impressive to the world, but the truth is that no miracle is as everlastingly necessary to an individual than being brought to faith through the Gospel.

Just think: through your pastors here in Ottawa, the LORD has accomplished something extraordinary in you: he has made you his child and heir of everlasting life. And the LORD wants to do the same for many others in Ottawa and throughout the world who do not know him. That is why he invites you to pray for more workers. Sharing his compassion for the lost, he wants you to actively encourage people for ministry – supporting them as best you can. He even wants you

to examine yourself, asking, “How can the LORD use me – if not as a public minister of the Gospel, then at least to support the Gospel ministry with my time, talents, and treasures?”

And why does Jesus want you to do that? Because as he looks over our city, country, continent, and world, he sees many people who are troubled and downcast – like sheep without a shepherd. His heart goes out to them, and he wants your heart to do the same. Pray for Gospel ministers, therefore, and joyfully do all you can to support Christ’s kingdom work as he answers your prayers. Amen.

¹ Cf. John 10:10