

20170618 Sermon Proper 6 2017

June 18, 2017

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This morning we meditate upon the Gospel Lesson previously read.

As we look at this Gospel Lesson, we should ask a question. Why is this passage so close to the feast of Holy Trinity last week, and to Pentecost the week before that? And as I ask that keep in mind that those feasts celebrate the birth of the Church and the confession of our God respectively. So why so close to them?

Well, do you remember what I said a couple of weeks ago about why the Church exists? If you were able to be with us that day, what's the purpose of the church? That repentance and forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in Jesus' Name. Do you remember that? So, is that the point today? We have got to get this message out there! Well that is important, isn't it? I mean the church has that job to do. We are given the task of confessing this faith to the broken world. It's not something that's a burden it's a work of love. The Lord has given us freedom from sin! What a gift! But is that what Jesus is meaning here?

Look at what it says: **“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”** Well, what does Jesus mean when He says that? Is He saying that we should pray that the people of the Church would labor more so that the Church would be able to get more people in the Church? Well, not exactly. That's sort of been the emphasis of missions movements since the 1800's, but that's not exactly what Jesus is saying. Is it good for us to try to bring people into the Church? Yes. Is it good for the Church to grow? As God gives the growth, absolutely! But what did Jesus do next? He **“summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.”** Jesus took the twelve disciples, and made them apostles. He sent them out as pastors. So, what Jesus is doing is telling us to pray that our Lord would send men into His Holy Ministry.

Now as we hear that, it should tell us something about pastors. What is that? It should tell us that pastors are essential for the existence of the church. Without pastors the existence of the Church is incomplete, just as it is without lay people. But think about that. Do you ever think about having a pastor as essential to your faith, that for your faith to be complete you have to have a pastor?

That's not often something we think about it, is it? And to be fair this does have to be understood properly. We have to understand it properly in light of what Paul says, that there is truly only one mediator between man and God, the man Jesus Christ. And so Jesus is the only pastor we truly need. In fact, as we are coming up on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this year, that's something that's often touted as revolutionary in Luther's approach: man related to God by faith, and faith gave the individual the ability connect to God on a personal level without man made institutions getting in between. And that's all true. But notice I said that this was about man made institutions. What about what God institutes? In other words, we speak of faith, but how does God promise to give faith? If you remember on Pentecost we talked about God and His promises, and how we don't expect or demand God to do something differently than how He promises. So how does He promise to give faith? What does Paul say? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. How will they believe if they have not heard? And how can they hear if someone is not sent? The Lord sends men into the harvest to speak that word. The Lord sends pastors.

And yet we still balk at that, don't we? We don't like the idea of God using lowly men for this task. And in our day that's kind of ambiguous, we don't like that God would only send men into the office of Pastor. And all the more we don't like that God would use human beings to accomplish such an extraordinary feat as to speak the very word which gives life and salvation. And why don't we like that? Think about it. Because that gives an awful lot of power to a person, doesn't it? That's a lot of power for a person who is corruptible and sinful. And think about how it could be abused. Think about how it has been abused! That's part of what the Reformation is about isn't it?! Those men were taking the livelihood of those poor people in Germany, falsely promising them and their loved ones freedom from punishment in purgatory. As Luther said in the 95 theses, if the pope has the power to do this, why does he make people pay for it?! And why did they do this? So, the bishops and pope could live lives of luxury.

So why would God do this? First of all it's not about power. We think it is, and abuse it, but it's about authority – which is different. Second, listen again to what Matthew tells us: **“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”** When Jesus saw the crowds, He saw that they were “harassed” and “helpless.” The word there for “harassed” has a literal sense of being skinned, flayed, or lacerated. Metaphorically it means that, to be harassed. And the word for “helpless” means to be thrown, or

specifically cast to the ground. And that's what happens to us in this world, isn't it? We're skinned, lacerated, thrown down, cast down to the ground. Often, then the world will kick us when we're down.

In fact, when we think about that we can see why churches with a "positive message" about the world do so well. We can see why people flock to hear that, yes the world kicks you while you're down, but God wants you to have your best life now. He wants to pick you up and help you conquer that financial need, help you get that promotion, help you be healthy, wealthy and beloved by all. But is that the message of the Scriptures? God wants you to have it all and have it now? Not exactly. No God does want us to have it, but not yet. He wants us to hear the promise that we will have it eternally, and pick up our cross and endure faithfully in Him now.

And so Luther said better, "*we see in the Gospel how Christ was moved with compassion when He saw the people as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36). If only we could see our need as God can.... The beginning of salvation is for us to recognize our calamity. For that reason God humbles us so that we may know our trouble, and then He heals us and leads us.*" You see, yes we are harassed and helpless, but God uses that to humble us and show us what our state really is.

So, what is that state? Look at Romans 5 for a second and you see it. Look at what Paul says there, and this is a verse you all know I mention a lot, chapter 5 verse 10: **"if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life."** Your sin makes you an enemy to God. When we are born into the sin of this world, our original sin and guilt, and when we ourselves sin as our own approval of that sin and guilt, we show just what we are: guilty sinners who are God's enemies. And this is what this harassing and helplessness shows us. It shows us just what kind of state we're really in.

And this is where Jesus sends pastors. He sends pastors to speak His Word. His Word that comes to you and it says, "Do you think we're not a mess like the rest of the sinful and broken world? Do you think that you're not harassed and helpless? What about the greed you pretend you don't have? What about the lust you convince yourself isn't offensive to God? What about the way you get distracted during the preaching of the Word, thinking about things you have to do when you go home? What about the inevitable end you're going to come to? What about the fact that in this harassment and helplessness eventually you will stop breathing? You can't stop it. And

why is all of this? Because of your sin that makes you God's enemy." And there is the need, but there we see our Lord's compassion.

But look at how Jesus sent out the disciples. Look at how He made them apostles and what they did. They went out and Matthew tells us that Jesus, **"gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness."** In fact, Jesus even said to them, **"proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."**

That's what the pastor – shepherd is for. You see the name Pastor is Latin for just that, shepherd. God sends pastors, His laboring under-shepherds into the harvest to bring the Kingdom of God to you. To bring His healing to you. To bring you the promise that even though are harassed and helpless in your sin, and without a shepherd, even though your sin makes you an enemy to God who deserves His temporal and eternal punishment, despite all of that, you have a Good Shepherd. The Shepherd who lay down His life for you on the cross, suffering all for your sins and rising again that you would have new life. God sends His pastors to bring His Kingdom and His healing to you in the waters of baptism, to bring the body and blood of your Good Shepherd to you for the forgiveness of your sins. He sends pastors so that you would have faith in Him and not be as a sheep without a shepherd in the harassment and helplessness in this world.

Now as I say all of this, the irony is not lost on me that I am your pastor and I am telling you this. I'm saying this as someone just as harassed and helpless, just as broken by sin. But you see it's not about me. It's not about Matt Zickler. I'm not holier, or a better Christian. I wasn't given a special dose of the Holy Spirit that will make God listen to me. No, it's about God's promise to the Church, to you. That when you hear that absolution, you would know it's for you. That when you receive Jesus' body and blood, you would know it's for every last one of your sins, that all of them have been crucified on Christ's bloody cross. All of them. And now you have life in His resurrection! And that is why He tells us then to pray for laborers to be sent in to the harvest. That He would continue to have under-shepherds bringing His promises to His Church, born at Pentecost that His people would be freed in Him. Freed from their sins and helplessness. Freed to live eternally in Him, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.