

Introduction

Welcome to St. Peter's Lutheran Church Estevan. Pastor Kleemola here to bring you a partial service for Pentecost 2 – June 14, 2020.

Readings for this Sunday

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 19:2-8
Psalm: Psalm 100
Epistle: Romans 5:6-15
Gospel: Matthew 9:35-10:8

Text for today's Sermon is taken from Matthew 9:35-10:8

The Harvest Is Plentiful, the Laborers Few

Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The Twelve Apostles

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve Apostles

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as

you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay."

Sermon – The Motivation for Mission

Dear friends in Christ Jesus; Why should the Christian Church send out missionaries to the far-flung corners of the earth? After all, don't we have enough to do in our own backyard? Canada itself is a mission field. And what about those missionaries and their families them-selves? What keeps them going year after year, making sacrifices to serve far from home? The answer to these questions is the same. It is found in our text. As we consider our Lord's own mission among the people of Galilee, our theme will be

Christ's Compassion Compels Us.

The Bible tells us, **"When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."** (9:36) That's how our Lord feels about people. This is especially said about those who don't yet know the tender mercies of the Good Shepherd. They are not yet brought into the enfolding love known within His flock.

So, they are harassed, harassed by sin, death, and the power of the devil. They're driven by the memory and guilt of what they've done wrong. They're helpless to make up for it, helpless to find a way out of either their sinful pride or their despair.

Christ looks upon them with a special kind of love. The word for this love is *compassion*. The Gospel tells us Jesus felt it that day for the crowds. The word in the Greek text is *splagchnizō*, from which we get our word *spleen*. That's an earthy, visceral way to talk about love. But that's how it is with Jesus. His compassion comes from deep within His heart. It's in His guts.

So, He cannot rest. He must do something about it. That's the passion behind this compassion. Compassion will spend itself in doing for others. Jesus has done much already. He's healed the sick, made a quadriplegic whole again, restored sight to the blind, cleansed lepers, unbound those who were deaf and mute, and cast demons out from those possessed. He couldn't help it. His compassion compels Him. It compelled Him to give Himself to death on the cross for others. That will be the ultimate expression of His compassion, not too far down the road.

But just now, when He considers the crowds as a whole, He does something unexpected. He bids His disciples to pray. **"Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the**

labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’” (9:37–38) Christ sends. He continues to have compassion on the crowds. Where people are starving for lack of His tender mercies, He wants to send labourers for the work of His compassion. He first sends His disciples.

Jesus had personally called them. The call of Simon and Andrew, then James and John, is given first. (4:18–22) Last is Matthew. (9:9) Now Jesus has twelve – just like the twelve tribes of Israel, set to be a light to the nations. So now He sends His twelve disciples out. One day, after His death and resurrection, the Spirit will connect for them the cross and what it achieved – namely, the forgiveness of sins. With that, they will be sent and go out to the four corners of the earth.

The striking thing in our text is that those who are sent are to do the very things Jesus Himself has been doing. **“He called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.”** (10:1) His direct command to His missionaries is this: **“Proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.”** (10:7–8) There is no divorce, no disconnect, between witness and mercy. The disciples witness in proclaiming the kingdom of heaven in the person of Jesus. They do the works of mercy too. The bringing of both is the work of His compassion. Christ’s compassion compelled His disciples too.

Those who want to talk about God apart from Jesus do not know this kind of compassion. They may call God **“the all-merciful,”** but they behave far differently than did the disciples of Jesus. Those who do not know the compassion of Christ even recently in the name of their god beheaded the children of Coptic Christians in Egypt, who loved Jesus too much to deny Him.

The Bible never speaks of mercy as mere words. God *does* mercy. Mercy is not so much an adjective as a verb. God mercies those in need. In the days of Abraham, He sees the outcast woman and her son, and mercifully provides for Hagar and Ishmael. (Gen 21:14–20) He gives them water in the desert, and the promise that Ishmael will become a great nation, which indeed he has.

Now Jesus will not treat people as nameless, *en masse*. He feels compassion for every individual in the crowds because they are like sheep without a shepherd. He will gather them all together. Jesus spoke of people beyond the children of Abraham. He thought of them also when He said, **“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd.”** (Jn 10:16)

Christ feels compassion for the lost. His Church will feel the same way, for she is bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. (Gen 2:23) She is the Bride of Christ. She lives in Him and He in her.

When you were baptized into Christ, Paul says, Christ was *put on you*. (Gal 3:27) You were baptized into His death and resurrection. All that He is and all that He has has been imputed to you. Daily, tenderly, and in many ways, He reminds you of His compassion for you. In His Divine Service, He absolves you with the forgiveness of His cross, feeds you with His own body and blood, and energizes you by His Spirit for service in your several callings.

So, you are no longer harassed by guilt and anxiety. You are no longer helpless to face the coming of death or the threat of hell. You have someone, the Good Shepherd, whose compassion for you has forgiven your sin, stripped away your guilt, and bestowed on you the hope of eternal life. This Good Shepherd, who has treated you with such compassion, has taken up residence in the heart of your life.

We should not be afraid to use the word *heart* in this regard. The heart, Scripture tells us, is naturally **“deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?”** asks Jeremiah. (Jer 17:9) It can therefore produce nothing good of itself, no works of compassion. But when Christ comes to such a person, what then? Then the heart is changed, and unwilling hearts become willing. The self-centered become new, directed outward from themselves toward those who are like sheep without a shepherd. As God's Spirit bestows upon you the gift of faith, your heart is changed too. You who have drunk deeply of Christ's compassion have drunk the finest wine without price. (Is 55:1) And Jesus says to you, **“You received without paying; give without pay.”** (10:8)

Stewardship of the Gospel proceeds by that happy course. Freely have we received, freely we give. It's like saying, “Birds gotta fly; fish gotta swim.” We just can't help it. The one who has put on Christ in Holy Baptism will also be filled with His compassion. His compassion compels us.

And toward what end, or toward whom, does His compassion compel us? Toward those who do not yet know the Saviour and His love, to the end that they will come to know Him, so that they will **“taste and see that the Lord is good,”** so that they will take refuge in Him and be saved through faith in Him. (Ps 34:8)

Nothing less than the compassion of Jesus Christ is the motivation for mission. His compassion compels us to it. For remember, this mission belongs to the triune God. It is not our option, discovery, or provision.

Whether we send missionaries is not really our option. Christ commands His apostles, **“Go!”** (Mt 28:19) So His Church sends those who follow in the apostolic train under the same terms, bound to His authority and word.

That people are lost without Christ does not wait for our discovery. That is the condition of all people who are without Him. How they are to be brought the tender mercies of Christ does not depend upon our provision or clever invention. That blessing is already provided in the Great Commission with the Spirit's power, God's precious Word and Sacraments. Christ provides the method for His mission. This method does not change. It will always mean faithfully conveying the sacred catechesis of apostolic teaching, baptizing as Christ directs, and receiving what He bestows as He commands us to do: **“Do this in remembrance of me.”** (1 Cor 11:24–25)

These realities are profound – the command and promise of Christ, the spiritual condition of the lost, the provision of the Lord's own Means of Grace. But why we send missionaries so that His sacred gifts may ultimately be received matters deeply as well.

Our motivation is not for personal enrichment. It is not that some should gain a cross-cultural experience. Our inner compulsion is not some vague sense of guilt we want to alleviate by visiting a third-world nation and giving its people things we have too much of anyway. Our defining motivation must remain the deep compassion of our Lord, the world's Saviour.

The Bible clearly tells us in this text how Jesus is moved by compassion toward those He sees as harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Do we feel toward the lost as Jesus surely feels? Do we care where they will spend eternity? Are we compelled to spend ourselves for others?

What Jesus felt, He felt deeply. He felt it because He was, and is, Himself the very embodiment of His Father's mercy and will to save that which was lost.

The compassion of Christ by which we have eternal life will get deep into our guts too. It is the motivating power for the Church's mission to the world in the name of Jesus. We cannot help but send many labourers into Christ's plentiful harvest. His compassion compels us. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

For the Church and her witness of hope to the world, that in every city, village and home across the globe the voice of the Lord may be heard by the faithful preaching of the Gospel;

For those who labour in the fields of the Lord today and for the Lord to raise up labourers for His harvest fields, that their work may be blessed and they may be protected and defended against the enemies of the Kingdom;

For our Synod and Tim Teuscher, our Synod president; for our congregation and for all our LC-C pastors; and for the resources to accomplish what the Lord has given us to do despite all obstacles and temptations, that united in the faith we may serve the Lord with joy;

For all who come to the Lord's table, that they may receive the Lord's body and blood in faith and rejoice in His gift of forgiveness, the renewal of their life and the promise of the eternal feast to come;

For all who live under the Canadian flag, for those who govern in this country, and for the causes of peace and justice, that we may all be given grace and freedom to serve the Lord honourably and in accord with His Word;

For the poor and hungry, the homeless and unemployed, and the oppressed, that the Lord would grant them mercy, and that we may help to relieve their suffering and want;

For the sick, that the Lord would grant them healing; for the wounded in spirit, that the Lord would make them whole; and for the grieving, that the Lord would comfort them, especially all affected by the ongoing pandemic and its effects, and those whom we now name before You: Pattie Berday, Meriam Koch, and Wanda Stang;

For those who know the riches of the Lord's blessings, that they may cheerfully return to the Lord the tithes and offerings of a grateful heart and support the agencies of the Church working to help those in need;

For the dying, that they may have peace at the last; and for our grateful remembrance of all those who have died in Christ, that in the fullness of time the Lord may bring us with them into His everlasting presence where sin and death will trouble us no more;

O blessed Lord, through Moses You called a people to Yourself and from them You delivered up Your own Son to be our Saviour. By His sufferings and death, He has redeemed us sinners from our sins, and by His resurrection He has released us from the fear of death. Help us to live as Your own people, doing the good works for which we were created, and praying with confidence the petitions and supplications of our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.