

## Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

July 2, 2017

**Matthew 9:35 – 10:8 (EHV)** – <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>When he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were troubled and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup>Therefore pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest.” <sup>10:1</sup>Jesus called his twelve disciples to himself and gave them authority to drive out unclean spirits and to heal every disease and every sickness. <sup>2</sup>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; <sup>3</sup>Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup>Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. <sup>5</sup>Jesus sent these twelve out and commanded them, “Do not go among the Gentiles, and do not enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup>Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near!’ <sup>8</sup>Heal the sick. Raise the dead. Cleanse lepers. Drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.”

### Introduction

Have you ever seen fields white for the harvest? Here in Wisconsin, most of the fields have corn planted in them. I suppose the tassels look somewhat whitish in the right light. I’ve also seen fields of grain ready for the harvest. Again, they carry a golden sheen as they ripple in the wind, rather than white. It wasn’t until we took our first trip to the beach in the Carolinas that I saw fields truly white and waiting for the harvest. It was cotton, of course.

### Theme: The Fields Are Ripe for OUR Harvesting.

In today’s Gospel reading, we hear about a different type of harvest that’s just ready and waiting out there to be brought into the Lord’s barns. And Jesus reminds us in these words of his that you and I have roles to play in that work. Today, let’s listen to how **THE FIELDS ARE RIPE FOR OUR HARVESTING**. May our Lord motivate us in three ways: **1) May our compassion be evident! 2) May our prayers be multiplied! 3) May our voices be heard!**

### Part I: May our compassion be evident.

The length of Jesus’ public ministry was about three years. I’m just getting into my 20<sup>th</sup> year as a pastor. And when I compare my ministry with Jesus’ ministry, it’s absolutely humbling. There are times when Jesus got physically exhausted, but most of the time, he seemed tireless. He was relentless in his mission to save the lost. The first two verses of our text could serve as a good summary statement of the greater part of his three years in the public: **“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. When he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were troubled and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd.”**

His work took on three forms: As a rabbi, he taught the Old Testament scriptures to the Jewish people who gathered together for worship in the synagogues on Saturday mornings. He also took on the role of a town herald and proclaimed the good news of his kingdom to any and to all. We heard last week – in the calling of Matthew – how he even went to those who were banned from the synagogue. And he acted as the Great Physician by healing every kind of bodily ailment. Huge crowds came to see and hear him everywhere he went.

Not only are we told what Jesus did, we’re also given a glimpse of the emotion that guided his actions. We’re told that his *compassion* led him to teach and preach to and heal the multitudes who gathered around him.

Compassion is different from love in that it emphasizes that something negative is happening to the object of your emotion. Sometimes we use the word pity in place of compassion. The root of the Greek word for compassion is a word we would maybe translate as “guts.” When Jesus saw these people and understood the cause of their problems, it made him sick to his stomach. As the one who came to be their Savior, his heart ached for them.

Jesus pitied the crowds because they were like shepherd-less sheep. The EHV translation says they were “troubled and downcast.” In the Greek, the first word brings out the strong imagery of someone having his or her skin sliced open by sharp thorns. The second word is a tad stronger than just feeling a bit down in the dumps. These people were “castaways – abandoned.”

May our compassion be evident as we open our eyes to see that the fields are ripe for our harvesting! We need to get past our own selfish worrying about our own overwhelming problems. We need to stop turning a blind eye to the tremendous spiritual needs of others. According to Jesus, “**the love of most will grow cold**” as the end approaches. In all honesty, are we so concerned about ourselves that our compassion is hidden from the view of the world around us, and instead, we appear coldhearted and uncaring?

If so, thanks be to Jesus! His loving compassion *did* show itself in loving action. As always, his perfection is credited to our accounts, and in repentance, we trust that he’s atoned for our failures. And as a fruit of repentance, our compassion *will* be evident. It’s evident as we help a sick or elderly member by providing a ride or preparing a meal or doing some yard work. It’s evident as we speak words of encouragement to those who are grieving or struggling. Your compassion will provide you with opportunities to share Jesus with those shepherd-less people who feel harassed by the effects of sin in their lives and helpless to do anything about it.

## Transition

The fields are ripe for our harvesting and we have an emotional impetus to go and help them. But not so fast! Before we go into the fields, **may our prayers be multiplied!**

## Part II: May our prayers be multiplied.

Picture the setting: Jesus and his disciples are traveling all around the countryside. He’s doing all the work right now, but they had to know that the day would soon come when it would be their turn. For common blue collar workers, that could be a bit overwhelming. So before Jesus sent them out, he began by showing them the dilemma and then praying for God to do something about it.

**“Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest.’”**

The Bible often uses the picture of God using us to sow the seeds of the gospel. In these verses, though, he focuses on the work of harvesting.

How do we view the people in our community, in our nation, in our world? Do we always see them as fruit, waiting to be harvested and brought into the Lord’s kingdom? Or do we see them as fruitcakes – in our opinion, peculiar and unworthy to be brought in alongside us? Are they bad apples – Muslim, Mormon, Jehovah Witness, Jew – that we feel ought to be thrown out on the garbage heap of God’s wrath? Or do we suffer from spiritual agoraphobia – the fear of going or looking outside at all? Do you see that the harvest is plentiful?

And do you see that the workers are few? In the past, maybe you’ve heard about how some of our teacher or pastor candidates don’t receive calls right away at graduation. Maybe you’ve gotten the impression that we have an overabundance of workers. Friends, it’s not that there isn’t work for them to do; it’s sometimes that we members of the WELS haven’t provided the funds necessary to expand ministries so that congregations can lengthen their supply lines and go farther out into the ripe fields. And, actually, in the past couple years, we’ve had some of the smallest graduating classes of pastors ever! The number of trained workers are few.

Two encouragements... First, keep your eyes open and stay aware of the increasingly pagan world around us. It's estimated that a little more than 1/3 of the world's population is Christian – and that's probably being generous. That leaves between 4 and 5 billion souls who'll be eternally lost if Jesus comes today. Secondly, multiply your prayers to the Lord of the harvest that he would prepare and send out workers into his vast and ripe harvest fields. Pray for the students and graduates of Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as many of them are installed in upcoming weeks. Learn about our world missionaries by attending LWMS rallies and regularly include those missionaries in your prayers. Pray for students in foreign countries like Malawi and Hong Kong who are training under our missionaries and professors. Above all, remember that Jesus calls himself the **"Lord of the harvest"** and remember that he's in ultimate control of **"his harvest field."**

## **Transition**

Finally, remember the theme of the sermon: **The fields are ripe for *our* harvesting. May our own voices be heard!**

## **Part III: May our voices be heard.**

The disciples had seen the crowds who needed to receive help from Jesus – both physical and spiritual. Their Lord and Savior had invited them to pray for workers. Now rubber meets road. He calls them to serve as a part of that work force.

**"Jesus called his twelve disciples to himself and gave them authority... [He] sent these twelve out and commanded them, 'Go... to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near!' ... Freely you have received; freely give.'"**

The disciples – "students" – became apostles – people who were "sent out" as witnesses and ambassadors of the Savior. That command to be witnesses and ambassadors is also given to each and every one of us. As the disciples were sent out exclusively to the people of Israel, Jesus commissioned us to go to **"all nations,"** to the **"very ends of the earth."** That's obvious when we understand that Jesus in fact paid **"for the sins of the whole world"** and that **"God wants all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."**

Resist the urge to sit back and let someone else do the work. The work is *yours* to do. When the Holy Spirit worked faith in your heart through his gospel, he led you to an understanding of God's free and rich grace. He made us reflectors of the love of Christ. Just as you have freely received the forgiveness of sins and Christ's blood-bought righteousness and heaven itself, go out boldly into the fields and disperse that good news freely, without holding back! Consider training for the full-time ministry. Pray for yourself and others. Give generous offerings to support our home and world missionaries. Learn a simple evangelism outline and memorize a handful of key passages. Listen to your neighbors and coworkers and then be ready to share the love and compassion and grace of Christ.

## **Conclusion**

The fields truly are ripe for the harvest and the workers are *YOU*. May God bless your witnessing! Amen.