

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, July 6, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36) When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

37) Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38) Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

1) Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

7) As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8) Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Dear Friends;

Facebook and Twitter are among some of the most popular social media tools today. Advertisers and celebrities actively court people to follow them by promising to share deals and information about themselves. If you have a Facebook page you probably have been invited to follow others and no doubt you have your own list of followers – friends who enjoy reading your posts.

Some of the most popular celebrities have millions of followers on Facebook. Of course Jesus doesn't have a Facebook page – but over 2 billion people around the globe claim to be his followers! And by God's grace you and I are numbered among them because the Holy Spirit has called us to faith in Jesus through the word and sacrament enabling us to enjoy the rest that Jesus offers those who follow him.

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV) 28) "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29) Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30) For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The rest we enjoy through Jesus includes the forgiveness of our sins, a place in God the Father's family and the assurance of an eternal home. It is in response to these and many other blessings that those who follow Jesus are willing to serve him by loving as he loved.

Jesus' love for sinners is evident in our text for today which tells us that **Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36)**

During the days of Jesus' ministry he attracted a following by going from place to place teaching and preaching. He would teach in the local places of worship. Luke gives an example of Jesus' teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. He read from the prophet Isaiah and then he proclaimed that those Scriptures were being fulfilled for them. From this example we see that Jesus pointed to himself as the fulfillment of the OT prophecies promising a Savior from sin. That was also the good news of the kingdom that he proclaimed as he walked and talked among the people in their streets and homes. This was the message that he shared with his chosen disciples as he helped them to understand God's Word.

The teaching and the preaching was the main emphasis of Jesus' ministry. But our text tells us that Jesus also healed diseases and sicknesses. These miracles validated his teaching and his claims to be the Messiah. He did them in fulfillment of the OT prophecies. On one occasion some of John the Baptist's followers came to Jesus and asked: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:3 NIV) **Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5) The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.** (Matthew 11:4-5 NIV)

By comparing the OT prophecies with the ministry of Jesus; John's disciples would be able to see for themselves that Jesus truly was the one who had been promised. Jesus was the one who would reveal the Father's love and compassion to a harassed and helpless world. **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.**

The people were harassed and helpless – they had been beaten up by sin. They were slaves to the devil. They were powerless to change their situation. And sadly they were also without a shepherd. They had no one to lead them to the paths of God's righteousness. There was no one who pointed them to the grace, the mercy and the forgiveness of the Lord. The religious leaders of the day pointed them only to the works of the Law – burdening their consciences with requirements which brought them no peace, no joy, no hope and no confidence. Essentially the religious leaders had left the people to wander on their own. Jesus was different. He was the good shepherd. He came to seek and to save the lost. He came to lay down his life for the sheep. He came to show them God's love, mercy and compassion.

During the days of his earthly ministry Jesus called twelve men to be his special followers. These men are listed by name in our text. **These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3) Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4) Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.**

Jesus gave these men special training and special insights into his ministry. And as our text informs us he gave them the opportunity to be involved in his ministry of compassion. Jesus gives us that very same opportunity today. He has called us to faith through his word. He has nurtured our faith with that word. The Holy Spirit has enlightened us and enabled us to see Jesus as our Savior as well as the Savior of the world. Our hearts have been filled with the love of Christ – a love which has compassion for those who are lost and helpless. Today once again

Theme: Jesus Calls Us to Follow Him

1. By praying for workers
2. By freely sharing his grace

When Jesus looked at the helpless crowds he saw a need for workers – for faithful teachers who would point the crowds to him. **37) Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38) Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."**

Would Jesus say that today if he lived in our world? Are there still opportunities for more people to be brought into his kingdom? A few statistics will show that the harvest is still plentiful.

World-wide less than 1/3 of the population is considered to be Christian. Just over 50% of the world's population claim to be followers of a non-Christian religion. And 16% of the world's population claims no religious affiliation.

The religious scene in our country is somewhat less diverse. About 75% of the population is listed as being Christian but interestingly enough 16% of Americans have no religious affiliation – a statistic which mirrors the world population¹.

Over 4 billion people in our world don't know Jesus. If my math was correct over 75 million people in our own country don't know Jesus. Let's bring that a little closer to home. Let's assume that 16% of the people in Sheboygan County don't have a religious affiliation. If that were to be true -- that means that there are over 18,000 people right in our back yard who don't know Jesus. Are there 100 people in your neighborhood? Based on statistics 16 of them may be unchurched.

We might be able to quibble over the numbers and the statistics but what I think is clear is that the "harvest is plentiful" and that there is a need for workers in the Lord's kingdom. Jesus call for us to follow him by asking the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into his harvest field is still relevant today.

Our prayers for workers might include prayers for our missionaries who are working around the world. They might include prayers for mission pastors who are in the process of establishing congregations in our county. We can also include prayers for the Lord's blessings on our synod's worker training schools or prayers that the Lord would lead more and more young men and women to train for full-time service in the Lord's church.

We can also pray that the Lord would fill the hearts of his followers with love and compassion so that they will be willing to tell others of his love. In our text Jesus called his disciples to himself and told them to pray. But that's not all. After he did that our text says: **1) Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. 5) ... Jesus sent [the twelve] out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6) Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7) As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8) Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.**

Jesus gave the twelve authority to do miracles in his name in order to validate their message. This was important because Jesus had not yet completed his work as the Savior of the world. We no longer need that kind of authority because Jesus' work is now complete. He has completed his work of setting sinners free from the curse of sin and death. The account of his crucifixion and the miracle of his resurrection is complete. So the authority that Jesus' gives today is different. Today he sends workers forth with the Gospel in word and sacrament commanding them to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything he has commanded. (cf. Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus also told them where to work – to work among their own people. Again Jesus has given us similar instructions. His commission today is not limited to just one nation of people. He has commanded his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. (Mark 16:15) Just as that work began "at home" for the twelve so it can begin in our back yards too. The apostle Peter gives us this encouragement: **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.** (1 Peter 3:15)

Jesus has freely given us the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of eternal life. As his followers we carry those blessings with us each and every day. They impact our approach to life and its challenges and

¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/04/04/global-religious-diversity/>

difficulties. They fill our hearts with love and compassion. They set us apart so that others may very well come to us seeking the same peace, hope, joy and strength that is ours.

And just as Jesus gave the 12 the message: The Kingdom of heaven has come near, so Jesus has freely given us the wonderful message of the Gospel to share with others. **Freely you have received; freely give.**

Theme: Jesus Calls Us to Follow Him

2. By freely sharing his grace

Jesus has freely given his blessings to us. We did not earn them. We did not deserve them. They are his gift to us. But this gift isn't intended just for us. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, the apostle John writes. **"And not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,"** he continues. (1 John 2:2)

The Apostle Paul also reminds us: **God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.** (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Jesus and the Scriptures are clear – we have been given the grace of God so that we can share it with others. Let us gladly follow Jesus by praying for workers and freely sharing his grace.

Hark! The Voice Of Jesus Crying (CW 573)

*Hark! the voice of Jesus crying, "Who will go and work today?
Fields are ripe and harvests waiting; Who will bear the sheaves away?"
Loud and long the Master calleth; Rich reward he offers thee.
Who will answer, gladly saying, "Here am I -- send me, send me?"*

*If you cannot speak like angels, If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus; You can say he died for all.
If you cannot rouse the wicked With the Judgment's dread alarms,
You can lead the little children To the Savior's waiting arms.*

*If you cannot be a watchman, Standing high on Zion's wall,
Pointing out the path to heaven, Off'ring life and peace to all,
With your prayers and with your off'rings You can do what God demands;
You can be like faithful Aaron, Holding up the prophet's hands.*

*Let none hear you idly saying, "There is nothing I can do,"
While the multitudes are dying, And the Master calls for you.
Take the task he gives you gladly; Let his work your pleasure be.
Answer quickly when he calleth, "Here am I -- send me, send me!"*