

Scriptures: Gen. 18:1-15; Matt. 9:35-10:8 (9-23)

## Father's Day

Today, people all over the country are celebrating Father's Day, and recognizing, remembering, and showing gratitude to all the dads, grandpas, and father-figures in their lives. Happy Father's Day! Most of all, we remember the depth of love our Heavenly Father shows us through the suffering of His Son on the cross for our sake – to free us from sin and death. How He loves us! He's the best Father, on which all our behaviors of fatherhood ought to be patterned.

Similarly, tomorrow is a national holiday throughout the United States. Juneteenth commemorates the time, in 1865, when slaves in Texas first heard the news from Union troops, that the late President, Abraham Lincoln, had issued the Emancipation Proclamation nearly two years earlier freeing them from slavery. They had been set free, but didn't know it, and hadn't been living like it – how often that happens to those who call themselves Christian! We're set free by Christ to do great things in the world around us, but so often we get "stuck" and think we can't. God equips us, through the in-dwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, to be able to do everything we're called to do – and more. If you have your Bible, or a Bible app, turn with me to Matthew's gospel, we're going to start reading at verse 35 of chapter 9, through 10:23. **Read Matthew 9:35-10:23.**

Did you catch how this passage opens? "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," (Matt. 9:35). He's not just talking a good talk – He's walking the walk. He's a God of word and deed. "When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd," (verse 36). The original Greek which translates as "they were harassed and helpless," literally reads "they were weary from being thrown around." Jesus shows compassion on them because they remind Him of sheep who need a Shepherd to protect and care for them – especially in their vulnerable state.

## The Workers Are Few

"Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field,'" (verses 37-38). The harvest of need doesn't seem to be cultivated in a positive fashion. Here's what I mean. There's plenty of hurting people in the world today. They need someone to take care of them. Yet, the workers, the people willing to be moved by the kind of compassion that Jesus felt as He looked out at the crowd, are all too few. The people willing to commit themselves to doing Kingdom good, and to harvest for the Lord of Heaven, are few.

Notice what happens next. "Jesus called His twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness,"

(10:1). What we find next is a listing of the twelve apostles: Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew – who wrote this gospel – James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, (verses 2-4, paraphrased). Matthew records next that the twelve were sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near,’” (verses 5-6).

That’s what Jesus told the apostles to do. How did they do it? He tells them: “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give,” (verse 8). The tasks the Lord gives to the apostles to do – for us to do yet today – are those which He modeled when He was driven by compassion to increase the number of workers in the field. He calls them to harvest as one with proven authority, and as their Teacher, who is showing them what to do and how to be. Discipleship is a constant that includes becoming a proclaimer, through word and action, of God’s good news, and spreading His Kingdom, living by His will as best we can.

## **The Twelve Apostles**

I want to think for a moment about those twelve apostles Jesus names in the first four verses of chapter 10. They were ordinary people. Common men, who decided to follow after Jesus, and are now being called to do more than they could have ever imagined. They were very much like us. In the end, each of them would prove to be a failure. One of them, we’re told, went so far as to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Yet to each of them, Jesus gave the power and ability to do good for their fellow human beings. He gave them power to relieve someone else’s suffering – to be beacons of light, and sources of hope in someone else’s life.

This is not a job that followers of Jesus Christ get to pass off to somebody else. This is something of which the modern Church needs to be mindful. See, this is why the Church in America is the way it is today. People stuck their heads in the sand, stopped caring about neighbor, and went along with government programs implemented during and after the Great Depression. Before the 1930’s there was no Social Security. Families, the Church, took care of the elderly. There wasn’t medical insurance. Families, the Church – the Methodist Church, specifically – built hospitals where people could go when they were sick. Most people farmed. So they traded medical care from the town doctor for fresh eggs and milk, or sausage, bacon, and steaks. They used the barter system, and everyone’s needs were met.

Those first apostles were called by name. They were given specific directions by Jesus on what to do to help ease the suffering in the world around them. True followers of Jesus Christ, even today, follow His directions on what they need to do to help ease the suffering in the world around them. And we are also called by name. He knows your name. The question we must ask ourselves, as individuals, is this: if the need for

compassion and cures is still plentiful, how is our discipleship expressing our authority as followers of Jesus Christ?

### **How Wonderful Our Impact Would Be, If We Follow!**

We are called and tasked with the same duties, the same job descriptions the twelve were given. And, of course, through the Scriptures, we see that the audience they were sent to changes – first to the Jews, and later, to the Gentiles. When I look at the list of those afflicted, in need of the compassion of Christ, which Matthew records here, “the sick, the dead, those with leprosy, the demon-possessed,” I can’t help but ask, are these specific types of people pointed out by Jesus because they were marginalized by the culture and society of Judea in 30 AD? I suspect this is the case. And if it is, then who are the marginalized around us, here in Shelby County, we’re called to be expressing the compassion of Christ towards?

Very soon we will be back into the swing of Vacation Bible School, on June 25-29. I’d imagine we’ll have kids coming who don’t usually attend here with us with any regularity. What kind of calling do we have, in regards to them? If we are all actively involved through the course of that week, can you imagine how wonderful of an impact that would be? How wonderful our impact would be, if we followed the example set for us by Christ and the apostles! Back in March, I asked you to fill out a survey about programming. Seventeen people responded. Do you know what they all said the number one, top need of our church was? Child programming during the worship service. Do you know how many people stepped up to meet that need? One person – Elizabeth Low. A high school kid herself. Friends, what happens when she goes off to college?

I have, I guess, a different view on kids than other people, probably because of my vocational background. My take is this: if they can sit for 35 or 40 minutes in a classroom during the school year, there’s no excuse for them to not sit in the sanctuary if we provide structured supports to them to keep them in here. If we make it our expectation that they will fully participate in the worship service here in the sanctuary, with their families, they will rise to that expectation. If we don’t, and we keep letting them “escape,” at what point do we reel them in, and say, “It’s time for you to be in here?” I’ve been watching some of the other church’s worship services in our county. Places with half-time pastors. You know what they do? They give the kids a pop-it, a piece of candy, or a coloring sheet at Sermon on the Step time, and send the kid back to sit with their families. Perhaps what we need to do here isn’t to try to go back in time, to find willing volunteers, but something else – which gives kids structured activities to keep them seated with us in the sanctuary. Since Easter, we’ve had activity bags ready for the kids. Inside are crayons, a coloring sheet, a fidget toy, and candy. The nursery needs to be a place where mothers can go to nurse their infants, change their toddler’s diapers, or redirect their fidgety toddlers.

## Radical Hospitality

We say we're welcoming, but are we? A while back, I was told, that as the pastor, it was my responsibility to invite prospective new members to my house for a home-cooked meal, because that's how things used to be done. Kendra and I both work full-time in the schools, have kids we're trying to raise – Alison is a handful at times – have parents, and grandparents we're trying to look after, and don't have time to throw house parties. I think, though, that hospitality is a good thing. As a local church, we need to get back in the habit of practicing hospitality by having meals together – here in the church building, open and available to anyone who can come. And friends, that's not me doing the cooking – unless you're happy with boiled hot dogs! We're called to love neighbors, even those we don't know – and to practice radical hospitality. You stepped up to that yesterday, for the Roberts family with Shirley Sheffer's mom's celebration of life. No one besides Shirley attended here, but you showed radical hospitality in providing them a place to grieve, and a meal. That's what we're called to do – to open the doors wide – even if people don't look like us, live like us, or even believe like us.

We cannot sit idly by, and assume that someone else is going to step in and do what we ought to be doing. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have been given as much authority as Jesus' apostles were given. We have the Holy Spirit within us, gifting us, coming upon us for service in the body of Christ with power. He anoints us with the authority of God – He transforms us so that we might be people who proclaim through word and deed the very good news of God, in a world ripe for the harvest, reaped through compassion.

The rest of our text this morning, verses 9-23 shifts the focus from what the apostles – and we, as Jesus' followers – will do to help people, to what they will face as they do their work for the Kingdom. Christians experience those same negative reactions from the world and society today. As Jesus continues to describe their missionary work, what is good news for others will – at times literally – feel like bad news for us. Friends, with the world in the mess it's been in since our ancestors ate the forbidden fruit, I suspect that this has always been the case. Maybe this is why the workers are so few! Many of us do not want to risk being punished and made to suffer for our good deeds, which help others. We prefer to be comfortable, and take the easy way out. So, New Hope, in closing, we've got a lot of hard work to do. Are we going to roll up our sleeves, and get started on the work the Lord has called us to do, and to be the people He has called us to be, or will we assume – wrongly – that someone else will come along and do the job which only you can do?

**Prayer:** God of compassion, You have opened the way for us and brought us to Yourself. Pour Your love into our hearts, that, overflowing with joy, we might freely share the blessings of Your realm and faithfully proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.