

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

July 6, 2014

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 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."...He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. 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; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus 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, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. (NIV)

I want you to turn with me this morning and look beyond this back wall. Pretend this wall is not here. What would you see? Right now you would see the large trees but imagine that the trees did not have all the leaves on them or were shorter; then what would you see? If you stand on our hill and look out when the trees are not blocking our view you will see more houses than you can count. But today Jesus wants us to see more than just many houses. This morning Jesus is standing among us with His Word teaching *"the harvest is plentiful."* Jesus wants to open our eyes to see the harvest fields right in our back yard.

So look with me once again. Can you picture all the homes filled with all the people around us? Do we wonder how many of them are at church this morning? How many of them understand Jesus is their Savior from sin? Which of them will join us one day in the heaven Jesus won for us? How many people around us are without God, without hope, and without direction? How many are harassed by this world, and helpless to the attacks of the devil? How many of them are like sheep without a shepherd? Ponder and reflect now on these words of Jesus *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."* As we do my prayer is that we: **Share our Savior's compassion for the lost!**

Jesus continued to teach and heal and preach and comfort people in every town and village He went. He kept preaching the good news about salvation for sinners. So it is not surprising that Jesus started to draw a crowd. Matthew gives us a pretty cool insight now into the heart of our Savior. We read: *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* The original Greek language gives us a couple descriptive pictures here that are difficult to bring out in the English translation. Jesus looked at the crowds and was deeply moved with a great pity for them. The word used literally means to have the heart, liver, and lungs move. In other words, His very inner self, His seat of emotions and feelings were greatly stirred so

that ***“He had compassion on them.”***

Why? Why was Jesus so moved as He looked at the people? Why such emotion, pity, and compassion for them? Many of these people had physical needs. There were those who were weak, and sick, and full of disease. But Jesus’ concern went far beyond the physical. Jesus saw a much greater spiritual need, ***“because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*** The picture here is that of sheep being cut up and bleeding after passing through a heavy patch of thorns. The words used convey that the people have been thrown off or abandoned. Their spiritual leaders placed heavy burdens on them but they themselves failed to lift a finger. They did not comfort them with the message of grace and forgiveness. They did not lead the people with God’s true Word. So the people were spiritually harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And Jesus had compassion on them.

As I view Jesus’ great compassion for the people, I start to feel pretty small. For I have not always looked at people with the same compassion. Have you? Or do you ever look at people harassed by false teachings and wrong ideas and wonder how they could be so gullible? Do you sometimes see people helplessly lost in sin and think they kind of deserve it? At times we struggle with showing others, especially those who are different than us, patience and love, let alone have compassion on them. Do our hearts really go out to the lost? Is our inner emotions and self stirred to the point we look at people with pity? Do we look at the troublesome neighbor, the not so nice co-worker, or the kind of strange classmate and think about what they need most in Jesus? Do we look at people like sheep without a shepherd and with concern for their spiritual needs?

I don’t know how we can look at Jesus here and not feel pretty small. But this is why we want to look at Jesus here because He shows the same compassion for us – a compassion for sinners who have not always been so compassionate - a compassion that lead our Good Shepherd to lay down His perfect life on a cross to save ours – a compassion that takes even all these sins away – a compassion that picks us up and guides us in how to show true compassion.

Listen to the first thing our Savior encourages of us when it comes to sharing His compassion for the lost. ***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.”*** Jesus wants us to start by dropping to our knees in prayer. He wants us to turn to our Lord with this request – to ask for workers. Ask the Lord to send people out into these harvest fields. Pray that workers go to tell the good news to all creation. Pray that the Lord sends workers to find the lost sheep and bring them under the care of the Good Shepherd. Pray to the Lord to send workers out into His harvest field!

How do you think the disciples reacted after seeing how much Jesus loves the lost? What do you think the disciples did after Jesus tells them to pray for workers? I imagine them right then and there praying to the Lord for workers. I imagine Jesus leading the prayer and again teaching them how to pray. And then after telling them to pray for workers to go out Jesus looks at His disciples, specifically the 12 apostles here, and says: ***“I am sending you – go!”*** It would be like having a prayer for workers right now and right as I lift up my bowed head look at you and say ***“wow here is the answer to our prayers...look at all the workers.”*** I just love how Jesus does that here because Jesus wants to use us as the answer to our own prayers. He wants us to share His compassion for the lost by going and doing whatever we can to reach the lost. He wants us to carry out the great privilege of

doing mission work in His harvest fields.

Jesus gives His disciples specific instructions of where to start. “*Go to the lost sheep of Israel.*” He gives them a specific message to tell. “*As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'*” And of all the instructions Jesus gives I really appreciate these words: “*Freely you have received, freely give.*” Aren’t all these same things true for us? We have a place to start. I’m sure God has put people in your life, people around you who are lost sheep. God has given us the message He wants us to tell – a message of law and gospel. Although we may not have been given any authority to do miracles, we have freely received grace, faith, forgiveness, life, peace, hope, joy, and eternal life. “*Freely you have received, freely give.*”

Do you see the harvest fields as you look beyond these walls? We don’t have to look all the way to China or Africa to see mission work? The statistics show that in the United States since 1991 the number of adults who do not attend church has nearly doubled. The truth is our country has now become one of the largest mission fields to the point that Christians from other countries have even started sending missionaries to cities here in the United States. This weekend I pray we took the time to thank God for all the blessings we have in this land we live. Especially, thank God for the freedom we have to preach His Word and reach the lost. Pray for this blessing to continue.

We understand how awesome it is to no longer be harassed and helpless. We have experienced the love of a Savior who died for us while we were still sinners. We grasp the power of His resurrection. We know the joy and peace of having a Shepherd, a Good Shepherd who had and continues to have compassion on us. How can we not want the same for all people? So once again look with me beyond these walls and see every person for what they are – a precious soul – one for whom Jesus, in an ultimate display of compassion, laid down His life. May we share our Savior’s compassion for the lost! Amen.