

## The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

### Text: Matthew 9:35-10:8

<sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, 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>Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” <sup>1</sup>He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. <sup>2</sup>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; <sup>3</sup>Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup>Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. <sup>5</sup>These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup>Go rather to the lost sheep 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 those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

### Theme: Workers in the Harvest Field

If you ask anyone in my family what my favorite television show of all time is, I am sure that they will know the answer. It is the *Andy Griffith Show*. I have about 4 seasons on DVD. I know much of the dialogue by heart, and still I laugh. When you compare that show of 40 years ago with today's shows, there is one thing which is remarkably difference. Church is a very important part of the show. I remember one episode in which it is remarked that the pastor's sermons are “as dry as toast.” There is another episode, in which the congregation gets some money and a great controversy evolves about whether to use the money to fix the building or for choir robes. There are many episodes when the characters are in church. What made me connect that show with this text is that they are almost always singing, “Bringing in the Sheaves,” which is a hymn about the harvest of souls. Jesus speaks about that harvest in this text. In these verses we see how He calls workers into His harvest fields.

I. Jesus looked out and saw a field, which was ready to be harvested.

He knew exactly where that field was ready. God's Word had been proclaimed among the Jews for 2,000 years. Now was the fulfillment of the promises. The fields were ripe and ready for the good news in Israel. He had begun the harvest Himself. He went through the cities and villages of Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel and healing the sick. Crowds of people were thronging to him. He told the disciples not to go among the Gentiles or Samaritans. That time would come soon enough. Now was the time to go among the lost sheep of Israel. They would proclaim repentance to the sinners, and heal the sick and demon possessed.

He was driven to do something by the compassion that He had for the people. He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. The pharisees didn't preach repentance or forgiveness. They preached work's righteousness and sought to show the people how much more righteous that they were. There was little compassion for the sick. The disciples once showed the thinking of that era when they asked Jesus, “Who sinned, this man or his

parents that he was born blind?” These people were harassed, but Jesus had compassion on all of them. He wanted to help them. He was working hard to bring them the forgiveness and help that they needed.

Our Lord is also moved with such compassion to spread the Gospel today. There are so many problems in our society and our world, and our Lord’s heart goes out to all who suffer.

- There are people who struggle with temptation. One of the voices that harasses us today is, “If it feels good, do it.” Rather than listening to our conscience, we are encouraged to silence it. When we fall into sin, we harm our lives and the lives of those around us. Jesus still has compassion on us. He wants us to turn from our sin to His forgiveness and righteous ways.
- There are people who struggle with finances. With credit as available as it is today, it is easy to get ourselves deep in debt. \$4 a gallon gas is an inconvenience for some people, but it is a great hardship for others. I still see a lot of people putting \$10 in their car. I noticed the other day, that \$10 doesn’t even fill up my lawnmower anymore.
- Sickness and injury sometimes plague us. We just get over one thing, and something else happens. There are times in our lives when we don’t get take a break from going to the doctor or hospitals. It’s bad enough when we are sick or injured, but sometimes worry about loved ones is even harder on us.
- Then there are the big disasters of life. Many of you probably had damage to your homes or its contents this past week. I can’t imagine what it was like for the people at Lake Delton who watched their homes rush down the channel. We have had members who suffered through fires in the past year. We could see the grief of people who lost loved ones to disasters in China and Burma in the past few months.
- Crime seems to be rampant. Earlier this year, our family had our car stolen. It happens so much, that it wasn’t taken very seriously. Homes are broken into. People are robbed at gunpoint. Even many people, who ask for help, tug at your compassion to try to scam you.

There is so much suffering and evil in our world today. Yet, our Lord still looks down with compassion.

His compassion moves Him to have the Gospel preached. Since His ascension into heaven, Jesus has sent us to preach the Gospel to the whole world. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, sometimes we sow the word, sometimes we water, and sometimes we gather the harvest. We simply bring the word of God wherever there is an opportunity. The Gospel will do its work. We might introduce someone to Jesus for the first time. We might encourage them to think a little bit more about His forgiveness and salvation, or someone might make the confession to us, that they believe that He is their Savior.

-Whether we are sowing, watering, or harvesting, we are doing the Lord’s work.

II. Just as He called the apostles, Jesus still calls workers into His harvest fields.

It’s interesting how He called the apostles. He began by telling them to pray for workers. Jesus wanted them to pray that God would call preachers of the Gospel. They had seen how great the need was, so they probably prayed fervently that God would send workers. Then much to their surprise, Jesus called them to work in his harvest field. In the Old Testament every prophet except Isaiah was hesitant. They all pleaded with God to send someone else. But God would never take “no” for an answer. I don’t know if any of the apostles were hesitant, but in the verses after our text Jesus tells them that they will be arrested and beaten many times for preaching the Gospel. I wonder how many

of them wondered what they had gotten themselves into. It's interesting whom Jesus called. He didn't call any rabbis, pharisees, scribes or Sadducees. He called a variety of men. Many of them were fishermen. One had been a tax collector. One of them was a zealot, which was a very radical branch of Judaism. He called some very unqualified men, but He would give them the gifts that they would need for the task.

He still calls workers into His harvest field today. He also wants us to pray. We look at the needs around us, and we pray that God will move men's hearts to serve in the ministry. We pray that God will provide our Lutheran schools with good teachers. We pray that He will move hearts to serve as chaplains in the military, missionaries, youth workers, outreach and Christian education workers, and church musicians. We pray that the apostolic ministry of our Lord will continue as the Gospel is proclaimed and care is given to those who are hurting both physically and spiritually.

How does God call? When I was in college, the most common question that people would ask me was how I felt that I was called into the ministry. They were looking for some kind of glorious revelation from the sky. My story disappointed many people and even left some wondering whether God really called me, but I believe it is how God generally called men to the ministry and men and women to other church vocations. He used various people to encourage me to think about becoming a pastor. They simply told me that I should think about it. If you know someone who has the gifts to become a pastor or church worker, God might also be using you to encourage them to consider serving God in this way. If someone is encouraging you, pray about it and consider whether God is calling you into His service. The way that God does call servants to His service is through His people. When I received the call to come to Benediction, it was not from a voice from heaven, but from the people of this congregation which was communicated through a telephone call from Wally Ernst. That is important because no one ever decides to become a pastor or start a ministry on their own. They are always called by God through the people of God.

God uses pastors, teachers and other church workers to preach, teach, and share His word, but of course He uses every Christian in various times and places to share His word also. On this Father's Day, I'd like to especially think of the responsibility that God has given to fathers. Paul writes to fathers in Ephesians 6:4 that it is their responsibility to bring up their children in the fear and training of the Lord. That is shown in some studies that I have seen in the last 20 years, which say that a child's biggest spiritual influence, be it good or bad, is their father. Over 70% of children follow the example that their father set. It shows how important it is that you have compassion on your children and sow God's word in their lives that they may grow to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and walk in His ways.

As we think of this text, we give thanks for those whom God has sent into our lives to sow His Word that we might come to faith in Jesus as our Savior. It was done out of both their compassion and God's compassion for us. We pray that God will fill our hearts with that same compassion for those around us and our children, that we will pray for the workers in God's kingdom, support those who serve, and share the Good news wherever the Lord also gives us opportunity. Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard Benediction Lutheran Church  
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