

Sermon for July 6, 2014 - 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 9:35-38 (NIV84)

Theme: **The Compassion of the Christ.**

- 1) *See his compassion for us.*
- 2) *Share his compassion with others.*

³⁵ *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.* 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."*

10 years ago Mel Gibson produced "The Passion of the Christ" - a movie that brought many people to tears because of how graphically it portrayed Jesus' suffering and death. After seeing this movie, many non-Christians found themselves asking a very important question - one that we would all do well to consider. "If Jesus is true God and could have stopped the Romans soldiers at any time, why didn't he?"

Our sermon text answers this question with five powerful words: "he had compassion on them." Jesus had such compassion on every Jew that rejected him, on every Roman soldier that tortured him, and on every single one of us, whose sins were the cause of it all, that He willingly suffered crucifixion in order to save us. Let us consider this amazing love, under the theme: **The Compassion of the Christ.** 1) *See his compassion for us.* 2) *Share his compassion with others.*

Part One: See His compassion towards us.

Our text begins: *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.* Jesus has good news for all. And what news is that? That we don't have to live as enemies of God - fearing his wrath because of our sins. And why not? Because God was in the process of reconciling the world to himself through Jesus' perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection. Through repentance and faith in this good news, the Holy Spirit changes us from being enemies of God, to dearly loved citizens of his heavenly kingdom. This is the good news Jesus wanted the world to know. The proclamation of this message was the entire purpose of his ministry.

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[Jesus] had *compassion* on them.

There are three different words for compassion in New Testament Greek, and the one used in our text is probably the strongest. It literally means to have your intestines moved - to feel so much mercy, pity and love that you actually get sick to your stomach.

Jesus felt a deep, gut wrenching compassion for the masses that surrounded him. Why?

Because *they were harassed.*

The word translated as harassed, literally means “to be skinned or flayed.” If you watched Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ,” then you will certainly remember how horribly gory Jesus looked after his scourging. Well, this is what Jesus saw when he looked over the crowds surrounding him: souls that were all cut up, weak and bloody because of sin and guilt.

They were *helpless*.

The word translated as helpless, literally means, “to throw down.” When Jesus looked over the multitudes, he saw souls thrown down from the glory God that had intended for them - so beaten up and bloodied by believing Satan’s lies that they were on the verge of eternal death. He saw people wandering aimlessly through this earthly life without anyone to help them. And those who claimed that they could help (the religious leaders of the day) only made matters worse by either telling them not to worry because things were not as bad as they seem, or by telling them that they needed to find in themselves the power to be saved.

This is what Jesus saw when He looked over the crowds that surrounded him, and He could not stand it. Jesus’ heart was filled with compassion; this compassion was the motivation for His great passion - His suffering and death for the salvation of the world”.

We too were once like the people in the crowds surrounding Jesus - harassed and helpless because of our sins. St. Paul writes: “*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods (Galatians 4:8, NIV 84) .*” Yes, we all were born slaves of the devil - dead in our trespasses and sins with no hope saving ourselves (cf. Ephesians 2:1ff). The LORD saw how every inclination of the thoughts of our hearts was only evil, all of the time (cf. Genesis 6:5; 8:21), how we, according to our sinful natures, considered God our enemy (cf. Romans 5:10), and how we were headed toward a certain future of suffering in hell. Jesus saw this and had compassion on us. His compassion was so great that it compelled him to save us - even though the cost would be great. This is why Jesus allowed himself to be mocked, whipped, beaten, spit upon, thrown down and crucified. He allowed all these things to happen so that he could suffer *our* punishment in *our* place in order to pay for *our* sins and win the righteousness we need in order to be reconciled with God.

What amazing love Christ has for sinners like us. He didn’t wait to see whether or not we would love and trust in him before He saved us. No, as our second lesson says, “*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son*” (Romans 5:8-10, NIV84)

And because Jesus did this - because He worked out our salvation while we still considered him our enemy, we can be absolutely sure of our salvation through faith in him. We can confess with St. Paul: *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:15-16, NIV84).*

Yes, Jesus' compassion is amazing. Not only did He suffer and die for those who mocked and crucified him, he died for me - a man who doesn’t deserve to be a pastor, let alone a Christian. Even though my wicked heart is filled with all sorts of sin, Christ suffered and died for me!

And the compassion He showed me, he also showed you; because we are all in the same boat. The Bible describes us all as helplessly lost in sin without Jesus - thoroughly wicked inside and out. But Christ saved

us - not so that we can go on living for ourselves, but that, having been made citizens of Christ's eternal kingdom, we might live to the glory of him who died for us.

Jesus had compassion on us, and calls us now to share this compassion with others.

Part 2: Share His compassion with others.

When Jesus considered the spiritual helplessness of the masses that surrounded him, *he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.*

Yes, there certainly are a lot of souls in this world who are more than ready to hear the Gospel. There are over 7 billion people on this earth, and yet the vast majority (over 4.5 billion people) are not even nominally Christian. Many of them haven't even heard the Gospel

And this sad truth plays out in our community as well. Sure, there are a lot of people who may, for tradition's sake, belong to a church, but how many people in our community actually know the Gospel? How many people in our community know that they don't have to be afraid of God or of what comes after death because of Jesus' compassion for them? The harvest is ripe - not just in Africa and Asia, but right here in Kewaunee. All of you know people who are hurting because of sin - even if they refuse to admit it. Their consciences feel flayed. They are beaten down by this world. Without even knowing it, their souls are longing to hear the comforting message of Christ's compassion.

This is why Jesus said: *Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*" When Jesus tells his disciples to "ask" for workers, he is not saying, "After you are done praying for yourself, tack on this afterthought that somebody else should go out and tell people about Christ." No, the Greek literally says: "Beg the LORD to send out workers!" There is a sense of great urgency in Jesus' choice of words. Beg for men and women who are willing to share the Gospel with others. Plead for them as a mother might plead for a specialist to see her terminally ill child. And why? Because many people are dying without Christ.

It is also interesting to note that when Jesus says, "ask the Lord . . . *to send out workers,*" he literally says, "throw down workers." Imagine building a sandbag wall to protect a neighborhood from an approaching flood. You would want as many sandbags thrown down the line as fast as possible. This is the idea behind Jesus' prayer for workers in His kingdom - may God send them as fast as possible!

And if the great number of people in our world dying without Christ were not enough reason to pray for workers (which it should be) then consider this sad fact as well: our synod is facing a pastor shortage over the next decade - so much so that our synodical leadership is already making contingency plans as how best to handle the situation. And, let me tell you: statistically speaking, the situation does not look good.

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."*

Do you know how the LORD answered the disciples' prayers for workers to spread the Gospel? The very next verse says that the LORD sent the disciples out to accomplish what they prayed for. The Lord does the same with us as well. No, we may not all be called to be pastors, teachers and evangelists, but as we pray for more workers in the harvest field, the Lord does want us to think about how we might join in this most important work. Through the Gospel, he places his compassion for the lost on our hearts. We don't want any one to suffer in hell - let alone our neighbors, friends and family. We want all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Let this desire, then, not only move us to pray for the lost, but also

to support our church's mission efforts with the financial blessings God has entrusted to our care. Let Christ's compassion move us to boldly confess Christ with those we know, when given the opportunity.

And don't let the fear of inadequacy keep you from sharing the Gospel. Remember what the LORD said to Moses when he felt unqualified to witness to Pharaoh: *"Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say (Exodus 4:11-12)."* Remember also the promise Jesus made with his disciples when he sent them out: *do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:19-20, NIV84)*

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Remember Christ's compassion for you - how Jesus' loved you so much that He died for all your sins so that you can live with him forever in heaven. Let Christ's compassion for you compel you to share this Gospel with others - first of all by praying that the Lord send out more workers to witness the Gospel, and then by being open to the opportunities Jesus gives you to confess Christ yourself. Amen.