

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

First German Evangelical Lutheran Church

Be a Part of the Solution

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.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."
10:1 He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.² 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.⁵ These twelve Jesus sent 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, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

There is an old saying that goes: "If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem." This saying can be applied to many areas of life. Often times, when something starts to go wrong at home or at work, it isn't a bad thing to ask the question: "Am I a part of the problem or am I a part of the solution?" In our Gospel reading today, Jesus shows how we can apply these words in a spiritual sense. There are many spiritual problems in this world. There are many people who are lost in those problems and do not know the solution. God has given the solution to the world's biggest spiritual problems. Our goal in life is to be a part of God's solution by carrying that Word to the world.

Our Gospel today comes from the early part of Jesus' public ministry. Up to this point, he had been doing most of his work in and around the city of Capernaum in Galilee. We read in the first verse of our text that Jesus expanded the scope of his ministry to the whole region of Galilee. Matthew records, "*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 was giving these people

what they needed. He was taking care of their earthly problems by healing disease and sickness, but more important he was taking care of their eternal souls by proclaiming to them the good news of the kingdom.

As he carried out this ministry, he saw something that was very distressing. He looked at the crowds of people everywhere he went and he saw that they were, “*harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*” These people were in a very dire spiritual situation. They were being harassed by the many temptations and trials that are common to all human beings. But they had no spiritual guidance to help them in their distress. The men who were supposed to be their shepherds—the leaders of the Jews had done nothing to help. In fact, they had made things worse by placing extra burdens on the people with their man-made laws and regulations and failing to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to them. When Jesus saw the people in this state, Matthew says that he had compassion on them—he felt for them in his heart of hearts. He recognized that there was a great amount of work that needed to be done to help these sheep, who were wandering aimlessly through life. And so Jesus summed up the situation by saying, “*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.*” There is much work to be done and not many people to do it.

Things have not changed all that much in the past two thousand years, have they? If we look at a group of people, such as the people of the city of Manitowoc, we may not, at first, see them as “harassed and helpless.” But, too often, we can only see outward appearances. Jesus could see though to what people were experiencing inside. He could accurately diagnosis their spiritual condition. If we looked at the spiritual state of those around us, I think we would find that there are many who live like sheep without a shepherd. Statistics tell us that about 65% of the people in Wisconsin are affiliated with a Christian church. This leaves 35% who are without a shepherd. And you can add to that number the great many people who may be affiliated with a church, but do not really have a church home. There are thousands of people right here in our backyard that find themselves in the same desperate situation as the crowds of Jesus’ day. They are attacked with temptation after temptation. They are weighed down with stress and strife in their personal lives. And where are they going to turn? Most of the advice they will receive from the television or the radio is not really going to help them. In fact, some of the false shepherds that are out there will only make things worse. These are people who desperately need to hear the solution God has for their problems as revealed in his Holy Word.

And what do we do about it? The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Too often we either fail to see just how serious the problem is out there in the world or we

know the problem, but we fail to act. We know that there are many people who need to hear the life-saving truth of the Word, but we do nothing to bring that truth to them. If we withhold the gospel message from those who need to hear it, we are not being part of the solution; we are being part of the problem. That is not what God wants. That is not what we, as God's children, want. We want to be part of the solution. So how is that possible?

Jesus tells his disciples in our reading today how they can be part of the solution. He tells them first of all, "*Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into the harvest field.*" Jesus expected that the disciples would have the same kind of reaction he did as he looked at the crowds. He expected they would want to do something to help these people. The first thing he told them they could do was to pray for them—to pray that the Lord would send workers who would bring the message of the gospel to those who needed so desperately to hear it.

We, then, see Jesus tell his twelve disciples how they specifically can be a part of the solution as he sends them out on a mission trip. First of all, he gives them the gifts that they need to carry out their mission. Matthew records that Jesus "*gave them the authority to drive out evil spirits and heal every disease and sickness.*" After he assured the disciples that they were equipped for the task, he gave them their mission. He said, "*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, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*" Just as Jesus had been doing, he now asked his disciples to care for the people—body and soul. He told them to bring the gospel message to a dying world.

We can learn from what Jesus told his disciples. We can be a part of the solution by asking the Lord to send out workers into the harvest field. There are many things on our prayer lists. We all have personal needs and family and friends we pray for. How much time do we spend praying for the souls of those who do not yet know Jesus? How much time do we spend asking the Lord specifically to send out workers into the field to bring the gospel message to these lost souls? We know these are prayers that God will hear and he will answer. We can pray them boldly.

We can also be a part of the solution by actually working in the harvest field ourselves. Jesus told the disciples, "*Freely you have received, freely give.*" We have all received freely blessing upon blessing from God. The greatest gift we have received is the gift of salvation. God has freely forgiven our sins for the sake of his

Son, Jesus Christ. All the times that we have withheld the gospel message when we could have spoken up—they are washed clean in Jesus' blood. All the times our words have hindered more than helped the mission of the church—they are washed clean in Jesus' blood. Forgiveness comes to us freely through faith in Jesus. That is an indescribably great gift. On top of that, God has given us additional gifts by his Spirit that we can put to use in the work of spreading the gospel message. Each of us should ask ourselves the question: "What spiritual gift has God given me that I can use to give freely to others?" Has God given me the outgoing personality to speak to others and invite them to church? Has God given me the gift of administration to serve on the evangelism committee to help identify those souls who need to hear the gospel? Has God given me the financial resources to support the mission of the church in an extraordinary way through my offerings?

Whatever gift God has given you, think of ways to put it to work for the benefit of the church. In this way, you become part of God's solution. Just think of what an incredible privilege that is! God has given us the solution to the world's biggest problems—he has given us his Word. God has also given us the ability to play a role in bringing that Word to those who need to hear it. May this mission become our life's goal and may the Lord of the Church richly bless us as we work in his harvest field. **Amen.**

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Pastor Steven Hahm
pastorhahm@hotmail.com
920.684.0101