

Sermon 2nd Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6), Yr. A @ St Johns – 14/6/20
“Jesus’ compassion, grace and the harvest” (Matthew 9:35-10:8; Romans 5:1-8)
- Pastor André Meyer

Text... Pray: Father, open our hearts to your word today, through Jesus Christ your Son, Amen.

It’s great to see you, but how are you going? There’s been a lot going on, hasn’t there? As if 2020 hadn’t already ‘started-off on the right foot’ through drought and ravaging fires, we quickly moved into lockdown, shutdown and ‘slowdown’ imposed on us by COVID-19. We’ve been concerned over food supply, our incomes, retirement funds, economic stress, mental health and personal hygiene. We’ve been fearful of getting sick, worried about catching and passing on the unseen virus. There’s been uncertainty in *every* aspect of our lives – at home, work, school, church, family, in our social lives and in spending time with those we love, down to the very way in which we now need to live our lives. And we’ve gone through Holy Week, Easter, Anzac Day, and Pentecost which came and went without our usual celebrations. Globally, it’s getting dicey with China, with trade and the economy. We’ve seen power and political struggles, race rioting because of corrupted authority, black activism (Yes, Black Lives do Matter), calls for equality, senseless destruction, and we’ve felt shame for our collective past. And frankly, I’m tired of it all (all the bad news), how about you?

Personally, it’s been stressful as pastors, worrying over not knowing how everyone is going. It wasn’t the ‘slowdown’ I thought would be through the pandemic. It’s almost been ‘business as usual,’ for Pastor Peter and I, well, ‘ministry as unusual’ as it is at present. We’ve tried to connect in various ways online, but we’ve little idea if you have been connecting with us. We might be speaking to the wind ☺. We don’t know how you are feeling or if our members are all truly coping as life has been challenging for everyone in almost every way. With all our Strategic Planning and Implementation, will we even have a congregation left through this? Will the faithful be scattered, or enticed away from God and the Church in the days ahead?

In a way, perhaps like you, I feel like the people felt in our text today in Matthew 9. They seek solace and healing, peace and comfort from God for all their troubles of life. Perhaps not as sick or without help as they, still, most of us in some way have understood why they came for help to Jesus. We feel ‘harassed and helpless’ by all that’s been thrust upon us. So it’s no surprise we may feel a bit “*like sheep without a shepherd*” through these days (Matt. 9:36). And yet, we still come to Jesus. We come with all our sicknesses, our griefs, our hurts, and with all our burdens, sins and troubles we hold in our lives. We come to Him with our worries over our uncertainties, with our sufferings and the unfairnesses that we, or others, have had to endure – we come to protest about our lives and petition our Lord for help.

And yet, even though we experience these troubles, we are also like the Disciples. They were not immune from the sufferings of this world, but they were called by Jesus the Christ to follow, learn from and live with Him. Despite our own frailties and failings, we too have been called to follow Jesus; to learn from Him; to lean on Him when it gets tough, and to join with Him in His mission to humankind. And what does He teach them? “*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.*” (v.37)

We are jolted out of our self-centeredness by Jesus. Then in the next moment, we are engulfed in the vastness of human need, not only within ourselves, but in every person of this world. There is a harvest to be gathered among the people we meet – they are ripe for bringing in to God’s kingdom. There is ministry yet to be done, and you and I are called into this ministry of the kingdom. Although already, you see it with a glance in your mind’s eye, and it’s *simply overwhelming!* Yes, the harvest *is plentiful*, but the workers *are indeed too few!* And, we will get overwhelmed by meeting the need of the harvest that’s out there. We’re going to be exhausted, over taxed, over worked and stressed... “*We will never be able to do all you ask Lord,*” we respond. Yes, there *is* a great harvest out there – even among the people of God.

Thankfully, Jesus led the way and reminded us that we start with those who are right before us. And, just as He employed, the compassion of God is the instrument we are to use. The task may well be overwhelming, but we are to trust Him. Jesus tells us to ask our Heavenly Father to send out workers into His harvest field. Pray; ask the Father for what we need – more workers, courage, strength, compassion, patience, resources, faith – *whatever* it is, we are called to bring human need to the Lord, for He will provide.

Jesus then gave His disciples authority to heal sickness and disease and to drive out unclean spirits. He has given the same authority to His Church, *to us*, by sending the Holy Spirit into our lives. And, God calls each of us out into the harvest field – to seek out lost sheep *wherever* they are. Whether they are lost in their shame or failings; whether they need the presence of a friend, or encouragement in their anxieties, sickness, griefs or trials...

We know that Jesus has not only called His twelve disciples by name as He does in our text (10:2-4), He has also *called us* by name through the power of the Gospel (Isa. 43:1). We have been given the gift of a new life through the sufferings and death of our Saviour. We've been re-born into His kingdom in Baptism by the forgiveness of our sins, and we are given a new start with God whenever we need it.

As St Paul shared with the believers in Rome, "*at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly*" (Rom. 5:6). Just when we were helpless and weary from trying to save ourselves from our sin and struggles; just when we were discouraged in life; just when we had given up in despair over the state we are in; at just *that time*, Christ died *for us*. Our Lord, full of compassion for all who are lost in life's brokenness, comes and brings us His great love through His death on a Cross. *There*, our sins have been paid for *in full!* *There*, upon the cross our old way of living, our problems that haunt us, our selfishness and ungodliness, our need beyond measure, and our decaying and dying lifestyles are taken from us, placed upon Jesus, and are crucified with Him. As Paul says, "*God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (v.8).

Yes, God demonstrates His love and compassion by making the first move towards us as sinners – a move we could never hope to make by ourselves to get to Him. In Christ, He comes to trade our dying lives and ways, with His new life. We hide away in shame at the disappointment we have been to God, and isolate ourselves from Him. But God is not afraid of our sin. He loves us – even before we were born, even though we live like His enemies, even though we let sin rule over us... while we were yet sinners (still lost in our sin), Jesus loved us, accepted us and died for you and me. ...It means God loves us even despite of our wrongs because of Jesus. As Paul reminds us, "*God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit*" He has given us (Rom. 5:5).

Jesus' words in our Gospel text ring true: "*Freely you (and I) have received from God,*" freely we may give (Matt. 10:9). Freely we have received mercy and love undeserving... that is why we are the perfect people for His kingdom's work. Why? Because we *know* how powerful God's compassion *is* for sinners. We know He pours out His love into our lives, so much so, that it overflows as He desires, to bless others around us. Despite our imperfections, we are the perfect ones who may truly share and reach out with the same love and compassion that God has towards us, that others may know of His mercy as well.

Friends, in Christ, 'while we were yet sinners,' we know that God loves us *not* for what we've done, but simply *for who we are to Him*. And so, we love, serve, give and live for Him because He first loves, serves and gives so much to us. God's love makes us new every day with resurrection life – alive with hope in the promise of a future despite our present circumstances. Yes, the harvest *is* plentiful, and the workers are few, *but* one of those workers, a sinner saved by grace, *is you!* Amen.