

4th Sunday after Pentecost
June 28, 2020
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Compassion for the Lost

Dear Friends in Christ,

I believe most people in the world would have compassion on someone who is diagnosed with cancer. But what if the cancer was directly related to smoking many cigarettes for many years? I think most people would have compassion for someone who is injured in an automobile accident. But what if that person's reckless driving caused the crash? Most would have compassion on someone who lost their job during this COVID slow down. But what if that person lost their job because they were stealing from the company?

If it was up to sinful humans, we would pick and choose whom to have compassion on and we would pick those we deemed as worthy of compassion. In today's gospel we see that Jesus did not pick and choose. He has compassion on all the lost sheep, beginning with those in Israel. He has compassion on all who are harassed and helpless, on all who are like sheep without a shepherd. The good news is that this includes us. Jesus has compassion on us. Today, let us learn compassion for Jesus. First we learn about those who need compassion and then we learn what true compassion from God looks like.

Matthew 9:35–10:8 (NIV84)

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.

For All Who are Harassed and Helpless

Jesus would have seen all kinds of people in the crowds that gathered in the towns and villages he visited. As true God, Jesus not only saw their faces, but also their hearts. He would have seen hearts that sincerely tried to keep God's law but were burdened by the guilt of failing to obey God perfectly. There were those who had covered their guilt with their own goodness and managed to hide their need for help from even themselves. Others were burdened by all the extra laws of the Pharisees that no one could possibly remember or keep. Maybe some had given up trying to keep up with the rabbis ever changing interpretation of God's commands and simply lived life as best they could. Maybe some had given up trying to live according to God's commands and lived any way they wanted. Jesus preached and taught all kinds in these crowds, from the openly sinful to the self righteous.

All had this in common. They were harassed and helpless. Harassed by the rules and laws of men and the temptations of the devil. Helpless to figure out what was right and good. Helpless to defend themselves from the devil. Helpless to do what God demands. We've been there too. We are helpless on our own against the temptations of the devil and his accusations. We've been tempted to just give up trying to keep God's commandments because..."controlling my tongue is too hard....loving my enemy is unrealistic....being holy as the Lord is holy is just not going to happen." We've been harassed by the devil's accusations of guilt and that God won't love us anymore. Sometimes we just don't know what the right thing is to believe or do. We too have been sheep without a shepherd.

And then we hear these beautiful words: "He had compassion on them." The word compassion has the idea of one's insides moving. We might say that our heart is moved or our heart aches when we see someone who needs

help. Our stomach is upset or tied in knots because of the situation a loved one is in. Compassion is a deep and strong emotion that affects us physically as well. Jesus has this strong reaction of compassion when he sees those who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus has compassion for each and every one of us. His great desire is for all, from the self righteous to the openly sinful, to be his sheep so that he can protect and nurture and give eternal life. This is the good news he preached to these crowds, that he has come to give eternal life. He has come to help the helpless and save sinners.

Christ could only get that message directly to a limited number of lost sheep. Therefore he entrusted this message of forgiveness to others so that all may know the compassion of our God.

Means to Freely Proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven is Near

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." 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.

Last week we looked at Jesus' surprising choice of Matthew to be a disciple. He was a hated tax collector. But as you look more closely at the disciples, we see that all of them had their issues. Peter often spoke before he thought. James and John wanted to destroy a village that had rejected Jesus. Thomas had his doubts about Jesus' resurrection. Simon had been part of the zealot movement which sought to overthrow the Romans. And Judas Iscariot would betray Jesus. But Jesus sent these twelve sinners out with a message to proclaim to other lost sinners. Twelve is not very many to send out into the world of lost sinners. Jesus says so himself.

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.

We continue to pray for more men to enter the pastoral ministry and for more men and women to enter the teaching ministry. There are Lutheran churches with empty pulpits and Lutheran schools without enough teachers to fully cover classrooms. And there are many many places where new churches and schools could begin just in the United States. Around the world, the opportunities are wonderful. However, we only have 39 missionaries currently in world missions. Ask the Lord for more workers in his harvest field. More workers to go out with the compassion of Christ.

Two WELS mission events scheduled for this summer have been canceled. Instead these two events are now one combined and online event. The LWMS convention and Taste of Missions at the Seminary have combined their efforts to bring us Taste and See. Go to <https://welstasteandsee.com/> to watch devotions, mission presentations and even learn some local recipes from the missionary families. I watched the world mission update this week. It is amazing to see how missionaries are bringing the compassion of Jesus to so many around the world. Imagine how many more could be reached with more missionaries. Go and watch some of these mission presentations this week and rejoice that Christ continues to have compassion through those sent out by the church.

As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'

Jesus has compassion by sending missionaries, pastors and you with this simple message: The kingdom of heaven is near. This short message is actually quite deep. First of all, it is a call for the sinner to wake up and repent. If the kingdom of heaven is near, then I need to know if I am in the kingdom or out of it. Am I an enemy of the kingdom to be destroyed by the Lord or a citizen of the kingdom who will rejoice when the Lord appears? Repentance is a large part of the message.

Some might think that having compassion on someone means to overlook that person's sin, to overlook their false beliefs. That is false compassion. It is almost apathy to say to someone that you don't care what they do or believe even if it brings them immediate or eternal harm. Christ had compassion on the Samaritan woman at the well and pointed out that she was living in adultery with a man she was not married to so she could repent. Christ had compassion on the Pharisees and pointed out their self righteous ways and hypocrisy so that they could repent and turn to Christ. Jesus had compassion on the rich young man and pointed out how he had not kept all the commandments because he loved his possession more than he loved God. "The kingdom of heaven is near" reminds us to repent and to have those hard conversations with people because the time to repent is now. It is compassionate to do so.

"The kingdom of heaven is near" is also the good news that Jesus Christ has come. For those twelve disciples and the people they were sent to, the kingdom of heaven was among them. For Christ was there...now. The King had arrived. And the King has compassion on the people of this world. The King is the Shepherd who lays down his life to save the lost sheep. The King gives up his throne in heaven to suffer and die the death of a notorious criminal. Jesus has compassion for the self righteous, the confused and the open sinners and sacrifices himself to forgive all sins. Christ's death and resurrection were only a few years away at this time. Certainly the kingdom of heaven was near for them.

Christ's compassion and forgiveness continue today. His sacrifice is as good today as it was then. Sins are forgiven through Christ. His Word is as powerful today as it was then. The disciples were given the authority to perform miracles to confirm the message they proclaimed. Christ has not given that same authority to all believers of all time. But the Word is still powerful. Jesus promises that if you forgive someone's sins, they are forgiven. Therefore, have compassion and forgive sins. Have compassion and tell people about Jesus. The time is still short. Jesus will return soon and the time of grace and compassion will be done. Until then, we look to the compassion of Christ and show that compassion to all who are harassed and helpless, to all who need a compassionate Shepherd.

Amen.