

**+ Matthew 9:35-10:8 + The Savior's Love Sees and Sends + 2nd Sunday after Pentecost +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 18 June 2017 +**

What do you see when you watch people? What do you see when you look out at a crowd or walk through a room full of people or sit on a bench at Destiny and watch crowds and clusters and couples go walking by? People watching can actually be kind of fun as you see people of all kinds, shapes, sizes, ages, cultures, backgrounds, and demeanors.

So what do you see when you watch people? Do you see things that make you chuckle or shake your head? Do you see characteristics unique to people here in Central New York? For example, how much blaze orange do you see during the college football and basketball seasons? What do you notice about the people you see? Do you see them as “unwashed masses” passing by faceless, personality-less, and unknown...or do you see souls?

During a very busy season of ministry, we find Jesus doing some people watching. It's amazing that he even had time to do so. Jesus was a busy man traveling from town to village to town all around Galilee, ***“teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness.”*** It was a very busy time for God's long-promised Messiah rescuing and healing the lost.

...But one day, Jesus and his disciples paused to look out at the crowds. People had been coming from all over to see Jesus and hear him preach good news of forgiveness and peace with God, good news they had been starving to hear for so long. Many came to have Jesus heal them or a loved one. Jesus could see how needy all those people were—physically, emotionally, spiritually. So did Jesus see them as a filthy, faceless mass of people constantly demanding of his time, his power, and his mercy?

No! As Jesus looked out at all those people, he didn't laugh. He saw ordinary moms and dads, brothers and sisters, grandmas and grandpas. He saw crowds and clusters and couples made up of rich and poor, young and old, Jew and Gentile. He saw the lonely, the scared, the hurting, the guilty, the grieving—and all of it made his heart sick. ***“When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.”***

What did Jesus see as he looked out at all those sick and lonely, hurting and harassed, distressed and dejected people? What he saw made his heart ache. Jesus looked at them through eyes of love, and saw soul after soul harassed and crushed by their own God-given shepherds—the religious leaders who should've loved and cared for their souls as God expected.

Their teachers, their shepherds were telling them that Jesus was a pawn of Satan. They told their flocks that they needed to work harder to please God. They demanded holiness. Keep all the laws! Perform all the sacrifices! Devote 1/10 of everything to the holy God! And keep hundreds of other laws that we've come up with in addition to God's holy Law! Guilt and despair crushed so many while others built shaky foundations of self-righteousness. Jesus looked out and saw ***“sheep without a shepherd.”***

Now here in suburbia, we're not so familiar with sheep and shepherds, but imagine a room full of toddlers with no one to watch them. Left on their own, what happens? Some lose control. Some need a diaper change. Some trip or bump into something and start crying. Some get scared and start crying. Soon they're all crying looking for help, looking for comfort, looking for a hug, looking for safety, but no one's there. Left too long on their own, they can even endanger themselves. ***“Sheep without a shepherd”***—what Jesus saw as he looked out at those crowds, but it was even worse for them, because their souls were in danger.

With a heart filled with compassionate love, Jesus spoke to his disciples, ***“The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.”*** Like a ripe harvest, there were so many souls out there who needed to be brought to Jesus, who needed to be saved before time ran out and they were lost forever. What was needed? Workers! So Jesus told his disciples to pray.

As you watch the crowds go by, what do you see? Do you see souls—lonely, hurting, grieving? Do you see people trying to seem strong or all put together, when deep down they're ***“distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd”***? Or do you forget that Jesus saw you that way? Do you look at others not through eyes of love, but eyes of judgment? Or even worse do you look at all those people with no concern for their souls whatsoever?

We forget that Jesus never looked at us that way. We forget that Jesus never saw us with the judgment and rejection we deserve. Jesus could just let us wander off and face the hellish consequences we've all earned, but he doesn't. He looks at you and me and all those hurting, needy souls out there—and it moves him to act. He

loves you, loves me, loves every person out there—no matter who they are—and Jesus yearns to save every single soul.

Jesus turns to you and says, **“The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.”** “Pray that I send servants to you and all those hurting souls.” So we pray, “Lord of the harvest, provide workers. Provide servants to bring in your harvest, to bring all those souls, even ours, to you.” And before we can say, “Amen,” the Savior provides workers well-equipped for the task.

That’s what Jesus did with his twelve disciples. He had them pray for workers, but the Savior’s love didn’t sit back and wait for an answer. Jesus used his twelve disciples to answer their own prayers. **“Summoning his twelve disciples, he gave them authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness.”**

The Gospel writer Matthew then provides the names of Jesus’ 12 disciples: **“Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.”** Looking back through 2,000 years of New Testament church history, you might be tempted to think, “That’s a hall of fame class of missionaries! They were the first to take the good news of Jesus to the four corners of the Roman Empire. Nearly every one of them gave up his life for the faith. What a ministry team!” But rewind 2,000 years and you’d more likely ask, “Is that the best Jesus can do? Fishermen, tax collectors, a zealot, and a dude who would betray him? You’re kidding, right! Jesus is going to bring in his harvest with them?”

...But doesn’t Jesus still do that today? We pray that the Lord provide workers, and Jesus answers our prayers by sending the praying. Jesus sends common, ordinary people—sinners whom he has saved—to serve in his harvest fields. Jesus provides pastors and teachers to serve his people, to serve souls in congregations and classrooms, mission fields and ministries, but it’s not just pastors and teachers. Jesus also sends you to serve with the unique set of gifts and abilities he’s given you to take part in his work here in the harvest.

Perhaps that means serving as a leader or a teacher or an assistant in our congregation’s ministry. That means using your God-given treasures, time, and talents to support the work and the workers. That also means ministering to others in your own ordinary, God-given callings as parents, as spouses, as siblings, as neighbors, as friends, as classmates, as co-workers. Maybe that means encouraging your sons to become pastors or your sons and daughters to become teachers in our Lutheran schools. **“The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few.”** So many souls need Jesus!

...But how can Jesus possibly use any of us to answer our prayers? On our own, even with the best of intentions, we will all fail. You could’ve said the same thing about the disciples, but Jesus equipped them so he could send them. He equipped them with his divine authority to cast out demons and heal every disease. In fact, Jesus sent them out with specific instructions. **“Don’t take the road that leads to the Gentiles, and don’t enter any Samaritan town. Instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you received, freely give.”** The Savior’s love sent his servants out equipped with his Word, his power, and his promise. **“Freely you received, freely give.”**

They were to give freely of the gifts they had freely received from him. Jesus had looked at them with that compassionate love that moved him to bring them into his family with forgiveness he would earn for them on the cross. Then Jesus sent them not yet to the ends of the earth, but to the people in their hometowns, their neighborhoods, their synagogues.

Jesus has done the same for us. His compassion moved him to rescue you and me from our sheep-like wandering, to find us when we were lost, to cleanse us of our sins, and to raise us to new life through his saving Word. Did we deserve any of it? Not by a long shot, but without hesitation, the Savior’s love still moved him to rescue us and bring us into his kingdom.

So now he sends us. Last week, we heard how Jesus wants us to **“make disciples of all nations.”** Does that mean we have to go to faraway places like Africa or Asia to make disciples? Jesus hasn’t necessarily called you or me to do that at this time, but he does send us to the people in our homes, the people next door in our neighborhoods, the people in our classrooms and workplaces and dormitories, the people all around us here in this place.

At this time, Jesus sends us to the lost sheep of Central New York. He sends us with his Word, with power flowing from him over Satan and his demons, and with his promise. “I saved you first. I saved you freely. You have received my love and my forgiveness. So now I send you to share it with that adult or that child or that teen in your life—that spouse, that significant other, that friend, that neighbor, that co-worker, that classmate. I send you so my abundantly ripe harvest can be brought in before the End.”

When the Savior looks at you and me, he sees us in all our sins and failures. Yet he looks at us through eyes filled with compassionate love, a love that moves him to raise us up and restore us. When Jesus looks at the people around us in our lives, he says, **“The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few.** Some of you I send to serve far away from here as pastors and teachers. Others I send far from their homes to serve you, but you? You, I send to serve here.” So when you look at all those people living around you, see them through Jesus’ eyes. See souls. See a blood-bought harvest of souls ready to be brought to the Lord. Then pray that the Lord provide servants, even us, to bring that harvest in before he returns when the time for work is over. God grant it for Jesus’ sake. Amen.