

35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming 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 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure 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, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Your Compassionate Shepherd

During Highschool, my best friend and I were traveling down the mountain after a night on the slopes. Tickets were always cheaper under the lights and being cheap we skied at night. I'm not sure why but we drove separately but I headed down first taking my time. Then for some reason or another my friend thought he should lead the way since he drove a jeep and probably because I was moving too slow. But there isn't anything quite like seeing your friend hit a patch of black ice right in front of you. He hit one ditch and then the other as he rolled down the center strip into oncoming traffic. There was a that gut wrenching feeling that makes you sick to your stomach. It's that same feeling when you see loved one suffering. It's called compassion. I'm sure you've felt it deep down inside as you take the pain of another person and make it your own. We know what compassion is.

So does Jesus. Jesus was deeply moved not only by the physical sufferings of people but also as he went about teaching, preaching, and healing. Jesus was moved with compassion, **"because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."** Jesus had compassion on the people because of their spiritual need. They were without a shepherd and there was no reason for it.

We may have compassion for the those who suffer physically around us but what about those who suffering spiritually? It's not much of a gut wrenching experience that makes you sick to your stomach when you see someone harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. But it should bother us because there is no reason for anyone to suffer. We have a compassionate shepherd who continues to send workers out into the harvest, who demonstrate the compassion and love of God that led him to his passion.

Jesus' compassion led him everywhere. After what appears to be the longest day of traveling from one location to another, visiting, eating, drinking, healing, and providing hope to the hopeless there is criticism and condemnation. ***But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."*** At a time when Jesus should have rejoiced at the work accomplished, the criticism begins, and Jesus gets back to work.

Matthew records, ***"35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming 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.*** Jesus went everywhere he could. He hit the streets. Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and providing healing and helping every single soul. The reason for this was compassion. Jesus saw their suffering and shared their pain. He took their suffering upon himself. He made their suffering his problem. But to be honest it wasn't the physical problems, the poverty, the injustice in this world that was of great concern.

Because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Harassed carries with it the idea of being torn apart. Some commentators mentioned having skin torn from the body. They are harassed like a wolf among the flock and after tearing them to pieces the sheep are helpless. Helpless is more along the lines of being thrown down, cast aside, left for dead. Jesus doesn't blame the sheep, "Stupid sheep, you shouldn't have wandered off."

Jesus sees them as victims of evil. Victims who believed Satan's lies. Jesus saw their suffering caused primarily by their spiritual leaders, who lead them to doubt the forgiveness, love, and compassion of God, questioning whether or not they've done enough to earn God's favor or giving them the false assurance that they have.

We too want to go everywhere helping everyone possible. But where do we start? There is so much to do. The situation has only grown since the time of Jesus. There are more people hurting now than ever. In an attempt to reach anyone and just do something our efforts, at times are met with criticism. What a waste of time and resources. The results weren't that great. Begin to question, "Was it worth it?"

As we look through all the towns and villages of California out to the Bay Area are we moved with compassion? More often than not I've thought, "You did this to yourself. There is no reason for me to bail you out." We may see so many suffering that after a while we fall into compassion fatigue where you just don't care anymore. There is too much to do so why bother to start. These problems are self inflicted. They did this to themselves. This is what they deserve. Such thinking sounds like the buddhist teaching of

reincarnation - the idea that someone hurt or suffering in this world is getting what they deserve for being a jerk in a previous life. For me to think, "I'm the self-made man. Pull yourself up by the bootstraps," sees us heading off to another false teaching called synergism which states that we participate with God in our salvation.

Paul says, "***We were dead in our trespasses and sins.***" ***We too were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.*** If Jesus left us to ourselves, there wouldn't be any hope for us. Thank God that Jesus had compassion. We too were victims of spiritual forces being dragged back to sin again and again. Rather than seeing them as the enemy maybe start seeing them with compassion - they are victims of the devil's lies. Those whom the devil has got ahold of possibly via some addiction or false teaching.

The truth is - God is compassionate. Jesus is compassionate even with those who have no compassion for him. Jesus looked out over the countryside and saw people. They did not see him. There was no reason for them to suffer. There was no reason for them to be without a shepherd. The Shepherd was among them. Like a compassionate good Samaritan Jesus helped and healed these people. Jesus had a different attitude towards those sick and suffering. They weren't people to be avoided. They weren't a waste of time and resources. They weren't less valuable because they didn't meet a certain set of standards but Jesus sees them and proclaims, "These are my people."

Some who will later arrest him and put him on trial, who torture, beat, and crucify him without compassion. Jesus himself was harassed and helpless - not in the sense that he couldn't stop any of what was happening to him. But he was torn apart and tossed aside because of his great love. Jesus suffered so that they wouldn't go to a place without compassion. The Father loved us and had such compassion that he sent his son who willingly took our place. He felt their pain and took it upon himself. Crying out in compassion Jesus did something about their suffering.

He even instructs his disciples to do something, "***Pray.***" petition God. ***Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out more workers.*** It's almost ironic that even before we hear a prayer from the disciples lips Jesus is already sending out the twelve. Then we realize that these were just ordinary men. A tax collector and a bunch of guys who like to sit around and fish. Jesus still has compassion on his church. He didn't stay dead but he rose and rules. He sends workers out into the fields to bring in the harvest.

That's because God is compassionate. He has compassion on us those who have no patience or compassion for others. Like a good Samaritan he helps and heals us. He makes us more like himself. His compassion moves us to love and serve others. We may go

through compassion fatigue. We may be exhausted during the week. We come again to church tired and broken and are fed with Word and Sacrament so that we may go out and feed others. As bad as this world can be - it's not as bad as hell. That's a place of unbearable suffering created for the devil and his angels. There is no reason for anyone to go there. Because we all have a compassionate shepherd who sends workers out to the harvest. ***The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.***

Pray to the Lord of the harvest that he would send out more workers. There are 93 vacancies in our synod. Pastors continue to retire and class sizes aren't keeping up. Our Seminary professors are being stretched by new opportunities as nations come to us for solid Christianity. There are growing opportunities as well as a growing gap between supply and demand. If you are thinking about working in the church, ***"Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field."*** Continue to plant the word, have compassion for the lost, pursue the prodigal, call the righteous and self-righteous to repentance, and invite them to the party of the prodigal.

Then realize that it doesn't depend on you, your education, your work. ***"Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain."*** (Psalm 127:1). The church doesn't depend on you or me but on the one who continues to build it. God can use the ordinary to accomplish his will. The disciples were largely insignificant people but that didn't disqualify them from doing anything significant. You may feel the same way about yourself but that doesn't mean God can't use you. But I don't have the power to heal, drive out demons... I'm not like them. We are like them in more than one way. We are equipped with God's Word which is powerful and effective. We can provide help and healing to a world by pointing people to a compassionate shepherd who continues to send workers out into his field.

Have compassion. You don't have to explain away the the pain and problems of this world. You don't need to establish blame. We already know who's fault it is. My friend was driving too fast on an icy road and well I was too. We were all headed the same direction when our compassionate savior saved us. My friend was okay. We rolled the jeep, returning rubber side down, pushed it off onto the shoulder and then he collapsed, went into shock, and then took the expensive taxi with flashy lights off the mountain. How much more amazing to think Jesus did that for us when we wrecked his car, his world, he took our pain, our problems, our suffering that we brought upon ourselves, and gave us his perfect life. That is our God who is compassionate with us.