

Pray for Workers

✠ **To share Christ's compassion. (9:35-38)**

✠ **Go proclaim Christ's kingdom. (10:1-8)**

In the name of Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, dear fellow workers in His kingdom:

Our Midwest storms this year can teach us some valuable lessons. When we hear about earthquakes in China or California and tornadoes in Oklahoma and Nebraska, we can get a little smug because it seems so far, far away. But when our own homes are threatened, when former members of New Life like Reed and Sylvia McPeak lose their roof and garage in a tornado that devastated their neighborhood and kills a two-year-old boy in Hugo – that's close to home. That gets our attention. That reminds us of Jesus' warning in our Gospel Lesson each New Year's Eve that we are no better than those who suffer. *"Unless you repent,"* Jesus warns, *"you too will all perish"* (Luke 13:5).

Jesus constantly reminds us that this life is quickly passing away. He wants us ready and to ready others for the *"harvest"* of the Last Day. Then *"the Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."* (Matthew 13:41-43 NIV)

✠ **To share Christ's compassion. (9:35-38)**

We have ears. We can hear how *"God wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* (1 Timothy 2:4) Jesus is so intent on saving everyone, *"He died in the place of them all."* (2 Corinthians 5:15 – literal) *"And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."* (NIV)

Therein lies one of the major lessons for this week and especially for our congregation at this stage of our development. We see how *"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 is teaching and preaching *the good news*, but when do we really pay attention and take that to heart except when our sins press hard on our conscience or things aren't going right in our life? Then we feel the need for God's gracious presence. It's when we suffer from sickness and disease that we see how relevant it is that God's kingdom of grace heals our bodies and souls and gives us the strength to patiently bear up under trials and afflictions until He removes them all in the eternal bliss and glory of heaven.

But if life goes well and the storms always blow over, then we get a little too complacent. Too often we Christians are like the sheep that thinks it has found a great place to lie down and relax. It does not realize that the rutted trail it has walked so long, while its wool grows matted and heavy with filth, could be the death of it. Lazily it lies down and starts to wiggle back and forth, enjoying its soft and cozy spot. But soon without warning its center of gravity shifts, the heavy wool on its back flips it over, and the contented sheep is now a "cast" sheep. With its unprotected belly exposed to the hot sun, in just a few hours death will overwhelm it. That's when we cry out, *"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why so disquieted within me? Put your hope in God. For I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."* (Psalm 42:11 KJV, NIV) As sheep who love to wander, we need the Good Shepherd to watch over us and our families, to seek and find us when we are "cast down," to restore us back on our feet again.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus wants us to have the same heartfelt *compassion* for those around us who do not yet know the Savior, cannot see how relevant His Word really is for our lives, and either waste their life in worldly pursuits or follow the crowds to high forms of religious entertainment

meant to make them feel good about themselves. Such is the way of sheep. But so loving is the Good Shepherd that *he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

A pastor in Michigan years ago kept praying for workers in the Lord’s harvest field. He was well loved in his congregation and the Lord was richly blessing his ministry. But when a Call came for him to go to Central Africa and set up a Lutheran Seminary in Lusaka, he asked himself, “What good does it do for me to pray for workers and then not be willing to go myself?” Pastor Ernst H. Wendland raised his family in Africa. Young “Ernie” is still there teaching at the Seminary his father started. Another son Paul, my first Greek teacher, is now the President of our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. After his first wife died of cancer, elder Professor Wendland married Kathy, a former nurse in Africa. Kathy Wendland has been a great blessing to our women’s ministries in the WELS.

What do you think when you **Pray for Workers – To share Christ’s compassion**? Are you like Moses and Jeremiah and Jonah and many of the other prophets who kept asking the Lord, “Send someone else”? Jesus’ heart was moved down deep inside by **compassion** for souls in need. But when He finds His cast sheep and sets us back on our feet again, it’s not so we can celebrate the Twelve.

✠ **Go proclaim Christ’s kingdom. (10:1-8)**

He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. 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; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Remember Peter and Judas next time you feel unworthy to **proclaim Christ’s kingdom**. Knowing one would deny Him and the other betray Him, Jesus called them anyway. In fact, Jesus knew very well that after at least three years of perfect preaching and teaching His star pupils would all run away and leave Him to be arrested alone in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And yet He sent them with special instructions: *“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.”* Their field was limited to the Jews at the time. The days for preaching the Good News to all creation would come after Jesus rose from the dead. But the heart of our proclamation is still the same: *“As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”*

Through His church on earth the Lord trains, equips and calls preachers for the public ministry. But out there in the workaday world, every Christian is a preacher. *Preaching* does not mean standing in a pulpit or walking around the sanctuary or using a microphone on a stage. *Preaching* is really *proclaiming*, telling it like it is to people like us who otherwise would not know. Christ’s *“kingdom”* can’t be found out in the desert or in some specific denomination. Jesus says, *“The kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:21), still *energetically working* (εργαζομαι), *up close and personal* through Word and Sacrament. Paul calls out in the urgency of Christ’s ambassadors, *“I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”* (2 Corinthians 6:2 NIV). Tomorrow may be too late.

So how do we get people’s attention and help them see how relevant this Word of God is for time and eternity? In our zeal for God’s pure Word have we given the impression we’re like the Pharisees criticizing Jesus in last Sunday’s sermon for eating with tax collectors and sinners? As if certain people aren’t welcome? As if we think we’re better than others? As your pastor, I see how eagerly this congregation wants to **share Christ’s compassion** as we **Go proclaim His kingdom**. We plan to examine our outreach in Sunday morning Bible classes this summer. If you can’t be with us, you can still **Pray for Workers**. And when the call comes to you, answer with Isaiah when he saw God’s full and free forgiveness for him: *“Here and I. Send me!”* (Isaiah 6:8) Amen.