

**The Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 14, 2020**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

## **Jesus and the Harvest**

Matthew 9:35–10:8

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

**Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and affliction. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (9:35–38).**

There’s an urgency about Jesus’ ministry. You can hear it in the Gospels. Jesus is on the move. He can’t sit still. He can’t stay quiet. He goes **throughout all the cities and villages** of Galilee—**teaching, preaching, and healing**. As our Lord goes about this urgent ministry, there’s something universal about it—**all the cities and villages, every disease and affliction** (9:35). As if He aims to reach the whole world. Here we begin to glimpse the mission Jesus will give the disciples and the whole Church after His resurrection: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,”** all tribes and peoples and languages—baptize them *all!* teach them *all!* (Mt 28:19). This is urgent!

What makes the ministry of Jesus, as well as the ministry of the Church today, so urgent? Look and see, for

THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL.

### I.

That’s what Jesus sees as He looks out at the world. He sees an abundant harvest, ripe and ready for the picking. A harvest of souls. People in desperate need of Him. That may not be what others see. I don’t think that’s what the disciples usually saw when they looked at a crowd. When they saw crowds, their usual reaction was to groan about how many loaves of bread it would take to feed them. They only saw hungry mouths. But Jesus looks out, He sees a harvest field, a good crop, and the work it’ll take to gather the harvest in. **When [Jesus] saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful” (9:36–37).**

I wonder, is that what you see when you look out at the world? When you see a group of people, is your first reaction to think, “Now *there’s* a harvest!”? Or is it to think, “What are they doing so close together?!” Are you moved by compassion for them? Or perhaps by worry or fear or frustration?

Which crowds do I mean, you ask?

How about the crowds gathered in protest in our cities? Even the looters and rioters. Even the police officers. Do you see that as a harvest field? Do you look at that and say, “The harvest is plentiful,” and then pray for the Lord of the harvest to send workers? Or the crowds of people whom we only know as numbers in the daily coronavirus reports—the cases, the deaths, each with a name and a face, like dear Jesse Meyer, a soul for whom Jesus died. Do you think of them and pray that the Lord would send workers into that harvest field? Or the crowds of high school graduates on parade, or those lining up to shop, or those home collecting unemployment as they wait for work to resume, or the crowds of infirm and elderly in our nursing homes—at the Highlands in Fitchburg or the Worcester Health Center.

When we look at those crowds, I know that we may have compassion. We may desire to help. We may wonder what we can possibly do. Why, we can’t even go to visit at the nursing homes these days. But first think of it the way Jesus does. The description He gives is rather strange. Jesus describes them both as harassed and helpless sheep without a shepherd *and* as a plentiful harvest in need of laborers. To Him, these are two sides of the same coin. The harassed and helpless *are* a harvest field. He knows their fear, their sorrow, their anger, their loneliness and despair. But, honestly, the crowds don’t look much like amber waves of grain, do they? We have a hard time seeing what Jesus sees. The harvest doesn’t look that great or that ripe. It takes the Savior’s eyes to see it. It takes the Savior’s eyes looking from the cross to see it. To see a people worth dying for, worth gathering as a harvest for eternity in His outstretched arms.

And it’s the same thing He sees when He looks directly at us, at this crowd right here. The harvest here is plentiful, Jesus says. Really? *Plentiful*? Because I don’t feel like an amber wave of grain, either. More like a dried out straw for me, or like a seed snatched off a path, or a plant with shallow roots about to wither and die, or one being choked by the cares of this world. What kind of harvest can you get from someone who is dry, withered up, and barely hanging on? Looking from the cross, Jesus says, “A plentiful harvest, that’s what!”

See how much He values this crop, these crowds, you, me. **For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died**—not for the righteous, not for the godly, not for those whose lives were all put together—but **for the ungodly. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Rom 5:6, 8). Not that we deserve it! Not that they deserve it! Not that anyone deserves it! But this is what Jesus does. By His death, our Lord turns a barren world into a harvest field. By His death, He redeems sinners for His kingdom—you and me and the crowds out there.

## II.

So what are we to do as we look and see the harvest all around us, the harvest that we ourselves are? Jesus leads us to pray. So we can see that the harvest is plentiful, but it looks like way more than any of us can do. What can we do for those who are harassed and helpless? What can we do for sheep without a shepherd? What can we do to bring Jesus to the world? **“The harvest is plentiful,”** Jesus says, **“but the laborers are few; therefore pray—pray!—pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest”** (9:38). That’s something that every single one of us can do. No matter where we are. No matter when it is. Before anything else, we are to pray. And I haven’t done that often enough. I’m guilty of not praying as I should. Jesus is the Lord of the harvest. He invites us to pray to Him. To ask Him to send laborers. To pray that He would gather in the harvest. To pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done. Without Him, every plan and activity of the Church, our outreach and witness, will profit nothing. So He invites us to pray.

Prayer is more necessary than anything else, dear Christian. Jesus doesn’t say, “The harvest is plentiful, so post something on social media” or “complain to a friend” or “worry about the state of the world.” Pray. So I urge you to pray. Head into your week with prayer. Turn off the news, the shows, the video games, and pray. Stop before you put up another post, and pray. Pray especially for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. We don’t have to figure out how to do it. He’ll figure that out. He simply asks us to pray. Pray for the training of pastors and church workers. Pray for towns and cities in need of faithful churches. Pray for our seminaries and seminarians.

You know what it’s like out there. The path our world is on will only lead to unquenchable fire without Jesus. Everyone will be like chaff that the wind blows away. What the harvest field needs is the Good News of Jesus Christ, and someone to deliver that Good News to them—to baptize and teach and proclaim the One Man who has reconciled the world to God by His death and saved us by His life. Pray for that.

## III.

How will Jesus answer our prayers? How will He gather in this plentiful harvest? First, there's what it requires of Him. It requires His death on the cross. Without that there can be no harvest at all. For the grain of wheat to fall into the ground and die is necessary for it to bear much fruit. He is that grain of wheat. For Jesus to give His flesh as bread for the life of the world. That is necessary. That's what Jesus did on the cross. It's what He's done to gather you and me and all into the barns of eternity.

But then look and see what Jesus does. He sends out laborers to do His work! Immediately after telling the disciples to pray, **He called to Him His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.** He sent the twelve to bring His kingdom. Then it names them: **first, 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 Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him** (10:1–4).

Why do these names matter? Why do the Gospel list the twelve by name? These are the men Jesus first sent out. These were entrusted with all that Jesus had done and taught. They were eyewitnesses from His baptism in the Jordan River clear through to His resurrection. They are the foundation on which the Church is built. Without the twelve apostles, there would be no Church. Without them, there would be no New Testament. Without them, we wouldn't know the death and resurrection of Jesus for the life of the world. Jesus gave them as the guarantee of His teaching and His work. We know Jesus through their witness. That's why they are so important. They preserved for us what Jesus did and taught.

So what Jesus did in sending those twelve is, in the end, to give us, His Church, the Scriptures. From them we have the entire New Testament, which brings what Jesus did and taught to you, me, and all who are in need, to those who are harassed and helpless. Jesus answers the need with the Scriptures. Then He puts these Scriptures into hands of His called servants, so they might deliver what Jesus has done and taught to people today—to baptize and teach and deliver the Holy Communion to the harassed and helpless. So the sheep have Jesus as their shepherd.

The Scriptures are a great treasure that we have to share. If you want to post, share, or say something to the world, how about this! Give that word to the world! The life of Jesus for them! After communion, we pray that other beloved sinners would kneel with us to receive His grace and life and that they would be gathered in by the Lord of the harvest on the Last Day. May it be so! For the Day is coming when the harvest will be

gathered. Our Lord will descend from heaven. The trumpet will sound. And He will send His angels to gather in the harvest of souls, those planted into His death and resurrection. On that day, we will be gathered into His eternal barn, to dwell with Him forever, a glorious and eternal harvest without end.

So, pray. Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send workers. Pray for Him to work through the Scriptures to keep us and gather others. And pray for Him to come again, so that kingdom gathered here may be seen in eternity, and so we will be sheep who have Him as our eternal Shepherd and be a harvest to His praise and glory forever.

---

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

---