

**Sunday, June 21, 2020 – Matthew 9:35-10:8**

**HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!**

The Workers Are Few

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

**10** Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

<sup>2</sup> 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; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

<sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,<sup>[a]</sup> drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

This is the word of the Lord for the people of God and all God's people said, Amen.

We're starting with a series of this morning that we're calling Open Our Eyes. And this morning we're talking about seeing the people. It's interesting that in the reading in the Old Testament, we listened to Abraham plead for a city that was an ungodly city, but he pled for it anyway. He pled because he wanted to know that the Lord would be merciful to those who were trying to do will To those who were righteous and deep down I'm pretty sure that he didn't want to see it destroyed, because he had opened his heart, that even those who were unrighteous might be safe. And he pled for that city, and he pled for that city, and pled for that city. He is a remarkable reminder of what the church is supposed to be like.

I checked into Facebook yesterday, and I have to tell you I was kind of frustrated at one point. I came upon a post from a Pastor friend of mine and his post was fine. But some of the responses, made me just clench my fists. When you hear people say, oh well, good, these people that are not doing God's will, are going to be destroyed. Oh well, good, when this young man meets his maker then he'll be trampled under his feet, just like all God's enemies. And I thought to myself, is that the church? That

can't be the church. But it was people from his church. And it made me really frustrated and so you know me I have a hard time keeping my mouth or my fingers shut sometimes. And I wrote that the church was about expressing the mercy and the love of God. And how could we celebrate the destruction of anyone without first doing everything that we needed to do to reach them and to snatch them out Satan's hands. How could we celebrate with glee the destruction of any human soul? Well, it got really quiet after that and I never heard much else except that my friend liked the post.

But you have to think, how does the church count in today's society, how do we make the difference? It seems like an odd question and maybe it is but it's still a valid question. We're entering the longest season of the Christian calendar; it's called ordinary time. And some call it the season of Pentecost. So, this week is either the second Sunday of Ordinary Time or it's the second week of Pentecost depending on how you look at it. It's the second only because last week was the first. So how do you count? Or maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe it's just June, 21, it's Father's Day. How do you count. Count what? The days? Mark the passing of time? How do you count the lessons that we learned over this season? And the lessons that we learned in Scripture.

One of the things that the season after Pentecost can do is remind us that walking is the power of spirit. We are the church, equipped and sent by God. And we worship the Christ that we offer to other people. So, by counting the days or counting the weeks, all season long from spring through summer into fall, we're saying that we know we have a mission. We have a purpose; we don't just gather to worship for ourselves. We aren't just about taking care of our own souls. We are being shaped. We're being involved in practicing how to offer Christ, to the world in new and different ways. The songs we sing with one another are the songs that we sing to the world. The prayers we pray with each other, are the prayers that we worship, on behalf of world. The testimonies we worship together are the testimonies that we share with our community and our friends and our families. So, by counting the days we are reminded that who we are matters. It's a part of God's purpose in the world. We are a part of God's purpose in the world.

So, our worship task in this surface is to bring the world into worship, to be reminded that we're preparing to be part of what our God is always doing in the world around us. We're talking about seeing the people, so how might we see our neighborhood. How might we see our community. What if we commissioned every photographer that we know? How many of us have cell phones? And are they capable of taking pictures. I'm commissioning you this week, as you go about your business, you go shopping or you go walk down the main street, you stop at the drugstore the bank. Snap some pictures. Not pictures that really look good and not pictures that make somebody look bad, just pictures of life. And you mail them to me or text them to me. We're going to make a collage, that's going to help us be reminded of who we are when we come back to the building. Honest pictures. Those pictures are going to be put on a board so as we look at them, we recognize that it's not just the church that we need to be in love with. But if we need to look beyond our walls.

What do you see next door to the church? Well, Terry, I guess we see your house! What else do we see next door to the church? There are houses around us and people. What do we see next door to the personage? Next door where we live? Who are the people around us? Do they look like us, do they live like us? It isn't about putting down the community or making us feel sorry for them or secretly glad for us. It's about seeing what's really there. We're sometimes so wrapped up in our church bubble that we

don't even see what's really all around us. We don't see what God is doing in the lives of people, even those we don't even know, we see how he's working.

Many people out there feel harassed and helpless. It's a pretty good description of what's going on these days. If they're suffering from some of the world around us it feels harassed and helpless. In fact, it would probably make a great sermon title. Can't you see it? Facebook, Harassed and Helpless at 9am. As catchy as that phrase is though, we should probably avoid starting there. There might be a space for that in the sermon but it isn't the best starting place.

Many people feel confused in this season, it's hard to understand how professionals of our nation can't seem to agree on anything. So here in the midst of a virus part of the professional community says it's dying down when another portion says there's a spike. Some people say there is less violence happening on our city streets these days, that people are learning how to communicate. But every evening there's a report of more violence, of more burnings, of more statues defaced or toppled. Our minds can't grasp the gravity of the situation or filter through the different reports that we receive every day.

We get confused. Some people feel like wearing masks and social distancing is an affront to freedom. They believe that all of this is a hoax at worst, and it best, worrisome sacrifice. And we're often hard pressed to calm them down. And this is worn on, they are good people. But they are weary of this mess and it's hard to grasp for them just what it is we're trying to do. And then there are still other good people who believe that wearing the mask is part of doing everything they can, and they willingly submit to social distancing and wearing masks. Believing it is a small sacrifice made in order to protect people. But they're worried too. And they're tired of being told how wrong they are and how stupid they are. Others are tired of Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter and they chant All Lives Matter, and they do.

But this season of struggle has been brought on not by just a virus. Truthfully, it has been driven by racism and bigotry and a long history of failing to talk to each other and understand each other. Think about it this way. When my cousin Becky's husband Tim passed away. Thankfully her pastor didn't show up and say, oh yeah, did I tell you that my Aunt Ruth died and her daughter Bev is really struggling. Well, the whole family is struggling. It wouldn't have helped. How would that have helped Becky feel strengthened in support? It wouldn't of. When it tells her is that her feelings and her struggle are not as important as Bev's feelings. What Becky needs to hear is, I'm sorry. I know you have to feel lost. Can I pray with you? And then I want you to tell me your favorite food before I leave because I'm making dinner tonight. I want you to just be able to do the important things and I'll help take something off your plate.

Well, that's kind of what happens with this Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter, everything, and why it evokes such strong emotions. Of course, all lives matter. And they know that too. But it gets lost in translation. Lives matter. But at that moment, the death in their communities is high. And when we say oh, we know what they mean. But what is heard is, oh our lives don't matter as much as the others. And so, they feel like they're worn down. A little bit like talking about Bev's cousin being in pain when you have someone right in front of you who is hurting. And nobody's doing anything to ease the pain.

Some people feel hopeful. I hope you are one of them. They see this pandemic as something that has caused us to rethink our healthcare policies. They see it as something that has brought America

together, that has prompted us to do things for others that we might not have done before or at least might not have done to the same length. And they're right. In many ways it has. They see a worldwide response to untimely and unnecessary death that's something that may change the way we look at race relations. And then they prayed that red and yellow, black and white, we are all precious in His sight isn't just a line in the children Sunday school song, but that it becomes reality. That we don't just recognize, but believe and live in that state. Regardless of skin tone or social status. Just as they see the upheaval in government, not as a trend, but as a need for reform that might make America stronger. And I'm glad that they're hopeful, because we need that. And so, we need to really see the people around this, because we're all just walking each other home. So, what do we do? We sing the songs of the church; we remind ourselves that we're looking. It's no longer a church as usual. I'm not sure but sometimes I'm ready to jump up and down and praise God for breaking down the walls of churches.

There was a study and Pastors asked their congregations, why do you come to church? What do you think the number one answer is? (from someone in the congregation; to worship God). Hmm, well that out to be the number one reason but it wasn't. The number one answer that pastors got is my friends are here. And that's not the right answer. It's great that our friends join us here, don't get me wrong about that. I love looking out and seeing people that love each other. But what happened to coming because we want to worship God. What happened to the church being the training ground and the work being in the streets of our villages and our cities. What happened to the mission? Without worship and learning, without training for the work, without a deep sense of being called to God's mission, the church is just like any other social club. We are called and what we are called to counts for something in this world.

There's another famous phrase in the text, one that seems like a starting place; the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. It's another truth that we can't help but latch on to. This idea has launched all sorts of mission and ministry in the church, and rightly so. It's the reality that faces the church all the time. There's too much to do and not enough doers. There's too much need in the world around us and not enough resources to meet the needs. Except that maybe it isn't about resources. Maybe it's about something else that's lacking. Maybe that phrase too isn't the best place to start. But asking the Lord of the harvest is something that needs to find a place in our preparation. It's another starting place.

But here's what Jesus said. He saw the crowds, and he was filled with compassion. And that's the real starting point. It should be our starting point as preachers, our starting point as a congregation wanting to engage our community and the people around us, wanting us to live as the people of Pentecost. He saw the crowd. And that means he was within seeing distance, not removed, not behind walls, not behind doors. It means that he was approachable and accessible. He was always interested. He was where the people were. It means that he wasn't just passing through on his way to another engagement, his next meeting, his next speaking opportunity. He was engaged with the people around him. We know he was engaged because he not only sees the crowd but he had compassion. It wasn't disembodied, it wasn't caring in the abstract, it wasn't seeing problems, it was meeting solutions. He had compassion to share with the people around him.

So what's it mean to see the people? To really see them. Not to prejudge or categorize but simply to see. To see them as people worthy of compassion and care. We might see that the people around us are indeed harassed and helpless, that they're suffering from a lack of a Savior, but we won't know that, until we look. We can assume, but what do we see? Because he sees and has compassion, and he knows

it's God's will that all will be gathered into loving arms of grace Jesus. Think about that. Jesus calls the 12 in order for them to be those laborers that are so few. The community just isn't called together for their own sake. The 12 aren't called in order to tend to their own souls or to make sure they are right with God. They are called to go out, to be the church that seats the crowds. And so are we.

So, you can't help but wonder how that might apply to us. Sure, we can make missionaries in history and even today, who still go out, not expecting payment and not relying on anything. The laborers in the fields, come to upset the status quo. And that's never an easy task, but it is a worthwhile one. How do we rely on something other than our resources in our comfort zone? We see the people, that might be exactly that, that we at first rely simply on the one who promised us he would be with us always.

We don't come to our neighbors because we want to fix them, or to threaten them, or chastise them. We don't approach others with answers and a kind of package to offer them without ever hearing what's going on in their lives. And we don't rely on our theology or our preferences of worship in our language of prayer. We must see our neighbors without the filters. And that's not easy. It's just not a matter of saying, I'm gonna do it. It's not flipping a switch to turn on or turn off our prejudices.

But we try again and again to see those around us because Jesus saw us. Maybe we'll see them as harassed and helpless. But harassed by whom, and helpless from what? Maybe we'll see them confused, maybe we'll see them buried under indescribable pain. Or maybe as hopeful persons who are resources of strength and grace that cause us to be amazed, because they might not even know the name of the God who makes them a blessing. What is most likely is that if we look close enough, we'll see ourselves. We're like them, and they are like us in all the ways that really matter. And that too, can be an occasion of praise.

So, how do you count? The point is, the days count. Let's make them count by paying attention to the world around. The world in which God is always at work. But what if we use ordinary time as our counter? Doesn't that say these days are important, after all we're not ordinary. It doesn't mean that. Ordinary Time isn't about being ordinary, it's about being counted. The ordinal consists of days that we count. It means these days, matter, they lead up to something in the liturgical calendar they lead up to other major feasts. Let's make them matter by practicing seeing the world around us. The world on which we live. The world God loves enough to die for. How will you count?

Amen