

Pentecost 3A (Proper 6)

Matthew 9:35-10:8

June 18, 2023

What would the church look like, what would Immanuel look like, what would you look like, what would I look like if we had the same compassion for others as our Lord did? You'll probably come up with a handful of descriptions if that were the case, and they would probably hit pretty close to the mark. With that in mind, let's set out today to see and hear the compassion of our Lord Jesus. We see the compassion and love of God for people, love so great that he called men as disciples and apostles to share his grace and mercy and proclaim the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Or, to summarize that thought: Because the Lord is compassionate, he sends.

Everywhere you look as the evangelists record the life and ministry of Jesus, we see him acting in compassion. Jesus was at about the half-way point of his Galilean ministry in today's Gospel. He was actively doing the work he came from heaven to do. He went around to all the towns and villages. He taught in the synagogues. He called people to repentance by proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. He healed people who were suffering.

At a specific point in his traveling, St. Matthew tells us that when Jesus sees the crowds of people, he had compassion on them. Pause a moment and consider how much is revealed about our Lord by this attribute of his. Every time this word is used in the New Testament it is used to speak of the mercy God, with one exception. And that isn't really an exception because Jesus used it in the parable of the Good Samaritan to describe a man's mercy, which actually models the mercy of God. Jesus gazed out over the throng of people around him and he identified so closely with those people that he was moved in his innermost being to take action.

What was it that moved Jesus to compassion? It was the spiritual and physical condition of the people inflicted on them by their own sin and the sin of others. St. Matthew reveals that Jesus saw them as harassed and helpless, troubled and downcast. Perhaps Matthew is even recalling and confessing what his condition was before Jesus forgave him and called him like we heard last week. You gaze into that crowd and what do you see? Someone troubled like the man whose son was possessed by a demon? Someone harassed like the woman at Jacob's well? Someone helpless like the woman who suffered from a bleeding disorder? Someone downcast like Jairus because his daughter was deathly ill? Someone troubled because he thought his sins were too big for God to forgive? Someone harassed because she just couldn't seem to get her life together like everyone thought she should? Someone downcast because he is convinced God is punishing him because everything is going wrong? Someone helpless because life seems to be spiraling out of control? It is all of these and more, yes everyone, including you and me that Jesus sees and is moved in his deepest being to act.

And so what does Jesus do? He first instructs his disciples to pray and ask the Lord of the harvest to send more workers into the harvest field. He then turns around and calls the disciples to be the answer for the prayers they prayed. He calls twelve common, ordinary, unexceptional men...fishermen, a tax collector, some working class men, a political extremist, a man prone to doubt and a traitor. And then, out of a deep and holy love for helpless and hopeless sinners, he sends those men out to preach and heal and cast out demons. When God wants to save, he sends out a man as his messenger and agent. You saw it with Moses last week and with Joshua today. You heard it in the 2nd reading last week and today. It is the way God shows his compassion. He loves, so he sends.

Ultimately we see this in how the Father's desire to save people from sin, death and hell, led him to send his Son. God's compassion led him to do what no human father would do. Jesus' compassion led him to do what no one but God would do. So great was Jesus' desire and will to save the helpless and the hopeless, the harassed and the downcast, people like you and me and everyone else, that he became the harassed one, he became the downcast one, he became the afflicted one, he became your sin.

And even more with this compassionate Jesus, what he accomplished in his life in Judea and Galilee and Jerusalem, he now delivers to people through the messengers he continues to send. When God wants to save, he sends out a man as his messenger and agent. It is the way Jesus still shows his compassion. He loves, so he sends.

Let's just take some time here to examine ourselves in some areas of the Christian life related to what we hear in today's Gospel. We began today by asking what would the church, Immanuel, you and me look like if we had the same compassion as our Lord? So why is that? Is it because we naturally would like to be competitive rather than compassionate? Is it because we're inclined to love ourselves more than God and others? Could it be that we have lost sight about what it is like to live a life without Jesus and have neglected the sheer horror of dying without faith in him? Have you had a pastor for so long, that you don't even think about what it would be like to not have a full-time pastor and have taken for granted the gifts God gives through that man? Have you lost the urgency of Jesus' words that the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few? Have you let earthly matters and concerns have priority over matters of the kingdom?

And look at that, just look at that, we're the ones harassed and helpless, troubled and downcast, worn and weary, bruised and battered. Own up to it. Confess it. Repent of it. And then rest in the compassion of Jesus. Yes, he looked at you, too, and saw one harassed and helpless, troubled and downcast, suffering and hopeless. And his compassion moved him to action. In his innermost being, so great was his love and desire to rescue you, it moved him to do everything for you. It moved him to live and die for you. It moved him to send you a man as his messenger. It moved him to send a man to speak words into your hearths through your ears, to preach to you, to teach you, to counsel you and console you. It moved him to send a man to you to drown your sins in Baptism. It moved him to send a man to you, so that he could give you himself through that man in the supper.

When the kingdom of heaven draws near, sin and its effects begin to fade away. The miracles of Jesus give us a foretaste of what life will be like when sin is gone forever. The sick will get better. The demons will be banished. The dead will live. When Jesus sends out his messengers, they don't go emptyhanded. They go by grace to share grace.

You are the undeserving recipients of God's compassion and love through the messengers he has sent to you. Freely have you received. Freely give. You who have freely received the forgiveness of your sins, freely give that same forgiveness to those who sin against you. You who have freely received the gift of being named as a child of God, go serve your neighbor. You who have freely received the peace of God, freely go and be peacemakers in a world of hostility. You who have received the treasures of heaven, give freely of your earthly treasure to support those Jesus sends that many more may receive his compassion. You who have freely received an eternity of joy, bliss and glory, freely give of your time to support the blessed mission of the church.

What would Immanuel look like if our compassion were the compassion of Jesus? I'm looking at them. You, undeserving though you were and are, are the recipients of the compassion God gives through those he sends. Today, having again freely received, go and grow in that same compassion shared with you. Amen.