

The Laborers are Few

Proper 6

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Matt.9:35-10:8(9-20)

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This year we are praying for God to send laborers into the harvest. In our circuit alone, three pastors are retiring, and there will be five positions to be filled. St. Peter, Holy Cross, and Zion and Bethlehem are each losing their pastors. Beyond that, Salem and Holy Cross have not yet filled their associate pastor positions. Again, these making five openings.

Our circuit is not alone. It is the time that many of the Baby-Boomer generation pastors will begin to consider or take their retirements. The number of graduates from both seminaries was not enough to fill all the churches requesting a new pastor from them. What is more, the United States has already begun receiving missionary pastors from other nations as a mission field. And so we pray that God will send out laborers into His harvest.

Verse 1

Jesus “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.’”

Jesus told them this after He had been traveling around the cities and villages preaching and teaching. He had seen that the crowds were like sheep without a shepherd, and He had compassion on them. Although the people had the Pharisees, the Pharisees were not honorable leaders. They had been harassing the people and driving them from Jesus, the one whom the people desperately needed. So Jesus told His disciples to pray earnestly that God would send out pastors.

Today, the field continues to be ripe for harvest. The field is always ready. It is not that we can see into the hearts of others and see if they are ready or not—in fact, if we were to look, we would only find resistance through the sinful nature present in all of humanity. Yet we never know whose heart God will turn through the preaching of His Word. Every heart begins in sin, turned away from God and His love, but the Gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ, is the only thing with the power to turn hearts to Him.

At the same time that it is ripe, the condition of the field is also very similar to that of our text. Too many of those teaching in churches today do not point to Jesus alone as the way to be saved. Since Jesus told us the only way to salvation was through Him, that means that those pastors are not honorable leaders either. Sadly, it may even be that some pastors who do not teach Jesus alone may be in LCMS churches. But at least the LCMS doctrine *Solo Cristo*, only by Christ, proclaims it even if the pastor does not.

So we need laborers sent out today, just as Jesus would send out the twelve two by two, as they are listed in our next verses: “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.”

Verse 2

“These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay...the laborer deserves his food.’”

Jesus told the disciples to only go to the house of Israel. These directions may seem very peculiar to us after hearing so often that Jesus came to save both Jews and Gentiles alike. His Word must be here taken as we sometimes need to take the word of an earthly father—to be trusted, knowing that things will work out if we simply trust.

Again, to us it is peculiar that Jesus didn’t send out His disciples to the Samaritans and Gentiles, but for the apostles at the time, it would have been expected for Jesus to instruct them in this way. Later, it would be unexpected by them for God to tell Peter to eat food that had formerly been forbidden and to interact with Gentiles, but as we know God would command him to do both.

Today, God’s Word can have the same effect on us. It can seem peculiar or unexpected. Hate your families—that is, love God far more than your own mother or father, your own siblings, or your own children. That seems pretty unexpected, and yet Jesus has commanded it. There is a right way to live sexually. This may seem peculiar in a society in which so many sexual sins are not only permitted but seem to be glorified. But again, God has given us His Word which reveals that those who practice such things and continue to practice them will not see the kingdom of heaven.

Yet the most unexpected and peculiar thing that God has done has been to send His own Son to die for the sins of the world. Following our text, Jesus would send the disciples out even more, later to the Gentiles and Samaritans as well. But after that, He would be betrayed by Judas Iscariot. He would be put before governors and the people, falsely accused, and handed over to the hands of unjust men. Nailed to the cross of Calvary, Jesus would suffer hell itself—complete separation from God—for all humanity, including you.

Jesus our God and our master suffered in this world; is it any wonder that we, and especially pastors should also suffer here? Not according to the end of our text.

Verse 3

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.”

These are the words that Jesus gave to His disciples when He sent them out; but they also apply to pastors—especially the ones we are now focusing on. All Christianity has been sent out to proclaim the mercies of God found in Jesus’ death and resurrection, but the estate of the world has not changed. It is still in sin. It is still aggressive toward the church, as wolves toward sheep.

These days, it is entirely possible for Christians or their pastors to be taken into court over their faith and the proclamation of the Word. Yet Jesus promises that He will give us what needs to be said at those times.

To many, the idea of becoming a pastor or having more pastors sent out may seem like a crazy idea. It seems like it would be wiser to live out our faith in hiding. But by the mercies of God found in Christ Jesus our Lord—His death and resurrection in our place for our sins—we find that we are moved by the Spirit to trust

God as our Father. And by those same mercies, it becomes pure joy for us to share God's Word, either as member or as pastors. The Gospel is, of course, pure joy, and yet the sharing of it may not sound like joy in some cases. Yet it is, and we will hear more about that next weekend. In the meantime, by the mercies found in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out more laborers. The field is ripe!

In Jesus' Name. Amen.