

Homily for Pentecost 2, 2020

Matthew 9:35-38

'How Jesus sees the world'

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TEXT

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

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INTRODUCTION

When you look out at the world around you,
with all of the various problems and struggles going on,

What do you see?
How do you feel?

Especially as you look at people who are struggling in one way or another,
How do you see **them**?
What do you feel for **them**?

Our text today gives us an insight into what Jesus sees,
how Jesus feels,

and this can be a tremendous comfort for us as we feel harassed and helpless,
and a tremendous encouragement as we join in his mission to the world.

In these few short verses we read that as he looked around at the crowds Jesus saw them in two ways:

As sheep without a shepherd needing compassion,

And as a plentiful harvest for God, needing workers to bring it in.

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SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD IN NEED OF COMPASSION

As Jesus looks around him at the crowds of people who are harassed,
And helpless,

Notice how he sees them,

And the reaction it brings in him.

He doesn't see them first as evil people,
to be responded to with anger and punishment.

He doesn't see them as useless people,
To be given up on and forgotten about.

He sees them as sheep without a shepherd,
Sheep in **need** of a shepherd,

And he responds with compassion.

When I was a child I was very fortunate to spend many of my school holidays at one or both of my grandparents farms in country South Australia.

I have some good memories of both sheep and working with sheep,
As well as crops and harvest

When it comes to my memories of my grandparents working with the sheep,
My overall impression was that the sheep required a fair bit of work,
And often seemed to be either getting in trouble,
Or causing some trouble.

There always seemed to be sheep who were sick or struggling,

Sheep who were in the wrong paddock or had wandered off somewhere,

Sheep who were caught up in a fence or had just found themselves in trouble in some way.

It's been well said that when Jesus refers to people as sheep,
it is a loving and well-meaning spiritual insult.

Jesus is realistic,
He sees just how helpless we can be and how prone we are to get lost and how vulnerable we are to threats,
But he responds to our plight, with compassion.

This is a very special word in the Gospels,
This word translated here as compassion.

The English dictionary says of compassion,
'a feeling of pity which makes one want to help or show mercy'.

And that's all true as far as it goes.

But the original word here has more depth and vividness to it,

It's a physical word,

It has to do with you being moved physically from right down deep inside you,

My old Bible dictionary says it's literally '*to feel the bowels yearn*'.

Now compassion is a good word to use here,

But it can be helpful for us to also get this more visceral and intense and deep sense of the word,

It's quite literally a 'gut wrenching' compassion that Jesus experiences,

Both here,

And at a number of places recorded in the Gospels.

You've probably experienced at some time seeing a person in severe suffering,

When you don't just feel sad in some vague way,

You actually feel it **in your body**,

But what's amazing in the Gospels is that this word isn't used for other human beings,

It's used mainly with Jesus,

He is the truly compassionate one,

He reveals that in the heart of God,

Is a deep and intense compassion for us harassed and helpless people.

Dear friends,

No matter who you are or what you are going through right now,

You need to know what when Jesus looks at you in your brokenness and your lostness,

He has a gut-wrenching compassion for you.

It's this compassion that ultimately lead him to the cross,

As he heard ST Paul proclaim to us,

'while we were still sinners,

Christ died for us', for you.

And as we his people look out at the world and its suffering,

And as we are transformed more and more into Christ's image by the Spirit's work in us,

We learn not only to think as he thought,

To speak as he spoke,

To do as he did,

But also,

to feel as he felt.

'As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,

*clothe yourselves with **compassion**' (Col 3:2).*

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A PLENTIFUL HARVEST IN NEED OF WORKERS

But Jesus compassion,
Although originating deep within him,
Does not remain there.

In the Gospels every time Jesus is said to have compassion on people,
He does something,
He acts on it.

And so now in these very same crowds of suffering people Jesus sees and feels something quite
different,
Although in another sense maybe just one paddock over in the imagination,

Now he sees a ripe and plentiful harvest of people for God,

A feels a desperate urgency in the need of workers to bring it in.

*The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out
labourers into his harvest.*

Jesus sees that in people's harassed and helpless states,

Whether it be because of physical sickness and suffering,
Or family and relationship conflict and strife,
Or financial and material destitution,

Whatever the presenting symptoms are,
Jesus implies here that our deepest problem is our need for God,

And to be truly compassionate to people Jesus wants not only to cure their physical sickness and
free them from oppressive spirits,

But he wants to bring them to God,
And into life with God,

This is the harvest.

The problem is man-power he says.

At another time of life I helped out for a little while on a dry-land farm in NSW.

It was big.

And yet for most of the year the father and son ran pretty much everything themselves.

That is until harvest time of course,
When out of pure necessity they just needed extra hands,
Extra workers,

It's just the nature of how things grow,
You don't need as many people for most of the year,

Then all of a sudden it's on and you need the people.

So much so that even a city-slicker like me could get a job.

Jesus sees a plentiful harvest,
But a shortage of workers,

He needs more workers to join him in proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and meeting the physical needs of people,

But the surprise then is what he calls for as the first priority coming out of this,

Not going and starting work,
Not finding and recruiting laborer's,

But first asking the Lord of the harvest to send out the laborer's.

His first priority,
Is prayer.

It's something of a mystery that God has chosen to use human beings as part of his plan to bring in his harvest.

God is God,
So if he really wanted to surely he could bring in his harvest in some supernatural way without the need for human workers.

But graciously,
He does invite us his Church to join him in his mission to the world.

But it's an even greater mystery, to me at least,
That God has chosen to use the prayers of human beings,
As part of his plan to bring in his harvest.

The powerful work of God's spirit in this world is inter-twined with the prayers of the people of God.

What a gracious mystery that is.

And this has a big picture application in how we pray especially for suitable

but this can be very simple and practical and part of the every day life of the congregation,

We don't have the right person for the right job,
Some significant role within the ministry and mission of this congregation,

And so what do we do,

Well when we've got our priorities straight,
The first thing we do is pray.

We remember,
Oh yeah, it's not our harvest,
It's the Lord's harvest,

We don't decide who the best workers are,
The Lord does.

And so we pray,
Lord please provide the people we need,
Please help us identify the right person.

And on a number of occasions I've been with people as we've prayed like this and we finish and someone says,

What about John,
Has anyone asked John?

And maybe John is God's laborer for that part of the harvest.

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CONCLUSION

So when you look out at the world around you,
with all of the various problems and struggles going on,

What do you see?
How do you feel?

Jesus sees harassed and helpless people as sheep without a shepherd in need of compassion,
And he has that compassion for them, for you, to the uttermost.

He sees a harvest for God just need workers to bring it in,
And he calls us first to ask the Lord of the harvest,
To send out those laborer's.

God grant it to us, for Jesus' sake, Amen.