

Season after PENTECOST SERMON

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
(Series A)
June 14, 2026

Sermon Text: Matthew 9:35-10:8

In light of the convention of our synod, Lutheran Church-Canada, that is being held in Winnipeg this weekend; it is fitting that we direct our thoughts to today's appointed Gospel Reading. For in these verses there is set before us what we might call the 'Three Requirements Of Believers In An Unbelieving World.' Or, to put it another way: What is our task, our purpose, our mission – whether it be as an individual Christian, a congregation, or as part of a synod?

And the first requirement is that we have a compassionate heart for lost souls. So we read here in our text: "**When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.**" Now, if you know anything about sheep, you can well understand the picture that is painted here. For without a shepherd to watch over and protect them, to lead and guide them; sheep will soon go astray. They will become lost and easily fall prey to wild animals.

And such is what Jesus sees before Him in the crowds of people who are gathered to hear Him teach. He sees how they had been led astray by the false teachings of the scribes and the Pharisees who laid a heavy burden upon them – the burden of all kinds of man-made rules and regulations. He sees how they are by nature; that is, as St. Paul puts it in the Epistle Reading: "**weak, ungodly, sinners, God's enemies.**" And what is Jesus' reaction to all this? Well, He responds not in disgust and contempt; but, rather, with compassion. After all, unless these lost, harassed, helpless sheep are brought into His fold, they will perish eternally.

And today things are still the same. For the crowds of people that we see around us are still like sheep without a shepherd. They are harassed by false religious teachings. They are helpless to do anything about that sin which lies so deep within them and that shows itself in greed and pride, in selfishness, in the lust for power and pleasure. They are wandering aimlessly and carelessly through life – sure and certain victims of the devil who, as St. Peter puts it, "**prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.**"

Oh, to be sure, outwardly we often see no difference between those who do believe in Jesus and those who do not. But when Jesus looks at them, when we begin to see them through the divine lenses of God's Word; we see people whose hearts are corrupt, whose minds are confused, whose lives are empty, who although healthy on the outside are spiritually sick on the inside, and who – in spite of all their education and wealth – are spiritually ignorant and poor. Just think for a minute of the millions of people here in this nation who do not know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent . . . or the thousands of people right here in our own community who do not confess Jesus Christ as Lord . . . or even those numbered among us here in our own congregation who are ignoring the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

Why does this matter? Quite simply, it is precisely and only by Jesus' suffering and death that took place for our sakes whereby sinners . . . sinners, yes, like you and like me . . . are forgiven and accounted righteous and holy in the sight of God. It is only through the message of the cross of Jesus whereby such saving faith in Christ is created and sustained in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

And so, instead of complaining about this sad state of affairs, instead of criticizing and condemning those who do not believe or have wandered from the faith . . . as we are often prone to do; Jesus calls us to focus not on what their task and their responsibility is to be, not on what they need to do – that is, to repent; but, rather, He tells us what our task and our responsibility is, what we need to do – namely, to help alleviate this spiritual harassment and helplessness of those around us who are like sheep without a shepherd. And that, in effect, is one of the purposes or objectives of our congregation being joined together with other congregations as Lutheran Church—Canada; namely, as the synodical constitution states: “The Synod shall strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world.”

And the very first thing that we need in this regard is a spirit and a heart of compassion for them. After all, if such people do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, if they reject and ignore God's Word, if they do not repent and turn in faith to the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ; they will be spending eternity in hell. How, therefore, can we not but feel sadness for them – especially when we remember that **“there but for the grace of God I”**?!

Perhaps some of these harassed and helpless people are members of your own family – a husband or father, a daughter or grandmother. Perhaps they are those neighbours who live across the street from you, or a fellow worker in your place of employment. But instead of complaining about them, instead of criticizing them; should not our hearts be filled with compassion for them? And, quite frankly, it is right here where we so often fall short. Oh, we might have a great concern for church budgets and activities, for convention resolutions and bylaws; but this Christ-like concern for lost and erring souls is often lacking.

And yet, a compassionate heart is the very first requirement of believers in an unbelieving world if some of these harassed and helpless souls are to be saved. Would to God, therefore, that He would ignite our hearts by His Spirit and so fill each one of us with such a spirit of compassion for others!

Now, once this spirit of compassion for others begins to take root in our hearts, we cannot but then ask: ‘What can we do – no, what can I do – to help these lost souls, to bring them to the Good Shepherd and the only Saviour and Redeemer of sinners?’ Jesus answers: **“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.”** And here we have, in effect, the second requirement of believers in an unbelieving world; that is, quite simply, prayer. And concerning the power and importance of prayer, St. James reminds us that **“the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”**

Now, I don't think that the devil is really all that concerned about our talking here today about having compassion for lost souls . . . or about our synod convention passing resolutions pertaining to outreach among various ethnic groups and the like here in Canada and in our various international mission fields – just as long as we don't actually start praying for them. For when we do, he knows that such a prayer has the very promise of Him who cast our demons and who overcame the devil's temptation . . . of Him who, by His holy precious blood, has redeemed people, including you and me, from sin and death and from the power of the devil . . . of Him who has told us to pray, **“Thy kingdom come. . . . Deliver us from evil.”**

And surely such a prayer is pleasing and acceptable to our Father in heaven; after all, as St. Peter says, **“The Lord does not does not wish that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”** And it is precisely for this reason that Jesus thus tells us to **“pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”**

And more harassed and helpless souls are brought into God's kingdom and Christ's fold through prayer than we probably realize. To the believers living in Thessalonica, for instance, the apostle Paul writes: **"Pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you."** While sitting in a Roman prison, he later writes to the church in Ephesus these words: **"Pray also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak."**

Once there was a woman by the name of Monica who prayed fervently every single day for her wayward, rebellious, gluttonous, playboy, unbelieving son. Finally, after many years had passed, her prayer was answered. Her son not only came to repentance and faith in Jesus and forsook his immoral lifestyle; but he would become one of the great fathers of the early church who we know today as St. Augustine.

And who is there among us who can dare say, 'I just don't have the time to pray for some lost and wayward soul'? Who among us can truthfully claim, 'I don't know any harassed and helpless soul for whom to pray'? Would to God that He would ignite our hearts by His Spirit so that we might indeed **"pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest"** . . . pray that more young men might enroll in our seminaries . . . pray for the pastors and deaconesses in the mission fields of our synod in places like Nicaragua and Cambodia.

Now, once we begin to pray for the return of the wayward and the erring, and for those who have been called to proclaim God's Word; we cannot but also ask: 'What else can I do to help snatch people from the fire and save them?' And this question brings us to the third requirement of believers in an unbelieving world.

So we read here in our text: **"Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction."** In addition, this is precisely what Jesus commissions His disciples to do as well; as our text continues: **"He called to Him His disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. 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 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."**

Now, to be sure, as the hymn puts it, we, of course, *"cannot speak like angels"* who proclaimed to the shepherds of Bethlehem the good news of great joy: **"Unto you is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord."** We *"cannot preach like Paul"* who was uniquely called by Christ Himself to be an apostle to the Gentiles. We are not numbered among the twelve disciples to whom Jesus granted special authority and power. We are not among those who have been called to be pastors in order to, as St. Paul puts it, **"preach the Word, in season and out of season."**

And yet, as the hymn goes on to remind us: *"You can tell the love of Jesus; you can say He died for all. You can lead the little children to the Savior's waiting arms. With your prayers and with your bounties, you can do what God commands."* In other words, in our various vocations or callings in life – whatever they might be – **"father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker"**, to use the words from the Small Catechism . . . and with our monetary offerings; it is there and then that God has called us by virtue of our baptism to declare His praises to an unbelieving world, to proclaim in word and in deed the Gospel message: **"The kingdom of heaven is at hand";** the Good News, as today's Epistle Reading puts it, **"that God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

Would to God that He would ignite our hearts by His Spirit so that we might indeed be up and about this task of inviting, of bringing, others to Jesus the Good Shepherd, the Healer of souls, the Redeemer of sinners. The Reformer, Martin Luther, put it this way: *"The noblest and greatest work and the most important service that we can perform for God on earth is to bring other people, and especially those entrusted to us, to the knowledge of God by the Holy Gospel."*

Now, here in our text Jesus then proceeds to give us not only the motivation for doing all this, but also the very power to do so: **"You received without paying;"** He says, **"give without pay."** Yes, freely we have received from God – received, as St. Paul writes in today's Epistle Reading, the gift of God's own Son, the gift of the payment for our sins in Jesus' sacrificial death, the gift of justification by His blood, the gift of salvation from God's wrath and eternal punishment, the gift of being reconciled with the one holy God and restored to His heavenly kingdom. And what are we to now do with these divine, heavenly gifts? Well, as Jesus simply says, **"You received without paying; give without pay."** Yes, freely give these gifts to others, to those who are harassed and helpless and lost.

May God grant that each one of us take to heart these words of our Lord in which He sets before us three requirements of believers in an unbelieving world, and so put into practice those words of the hymn:

*"Let none hear you idly saying, 'There is nothing I can do.'
While the multitudes are dying And the Master calls for you.
Take the task He gives you gladly; Let His work your pleasure be.
Answer quickly when He calleth, 'Here am I, send me, send me'!" Amen.*