

“SEE ALL THE PEOPLE”

Matthew 9:35-10:8 June 14, 2020

As most of you know I am what is called a “Lectionary preacher.” That simply means that I choose my scriptures for each Sunday from the three year cycle that is chosen for us Protestants to help us cover the Holy Word. Every Sunday we are given our choice of Old Testament, Gospels or another scripture from the New Testament. The cycle takes us from Year A, B, or C. Currently we are in Year A. I found early on that for my preaching I needed to follow the direction of the Lectionary to challenge me, inspire me, direct my spiritual growth and yours, and keep me from preaching every Sunday on “God is Love.” I’m not saying it has been an easy choice because there are some scriptures that are quite difficult to address in a meaningful sermon. However, those may be the most rewarding because I might have to wrestle with the message and what God is wanting me to share with you. But I feel that we have been blessed by this choice and I hope you will agree.

All of this is to explain the choice of today’s text. There is a famous phrase in this scripture, one that seems like a good starting place. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” (Matthew 9:37) This is a truth that we can’t help but latch on to today. This idea, this statement, has launched all sorts of mission and ministry in the church—and rightly so. It is the reality that faces the church all the time; there is too much to do and not enough doers. There is too much need in the world around us and not enough resources to meet those needs.

Except, maybe it isn’t about resources. Maybe it is about something else that is lacking. In verse 38 it reads: “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Sounds to me like a call to prayer and asking God to bless us with those workers. But there is another verse I’d like to highlight this morning.

Right at the beginning of the text, right at the front where it belongs is verse 36. “He saw the crowds”. That’s another starting point for us. It is his starting point; therefore it should be ours—our starting point as preachers and our starting point as a congregation wanting to engage the community around us; wanting to live as Pentecost people and as heart-centered disciples. He saw the crowd. Which means he was within seeing distance, not removed, not behind walls and doors. It means he was approachable and accessible. He was where the people were. It means that he wasn’t just passing through on the way to his next engagement, next meeting, next speaking opportunity. It means he was engaged in the world around him.

We know he was engaged because of the next phrase in the verse. Not only did he see the crowd, but in seeing it, he had compassion. His compassion wasn’t disembodied, caring in the abstract, seeing problems needing solutions. No, he has compassion because he saw the people around him.

What does it mean to see the people? To really see them? Not to pre-judge or categorize, but simple 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, suffering from the lack of a savior. But we won’t know that is what we will see until we look. Or, sure we can assume, but what do we see?

Perhaps it would be helpful to stand in the place of the other for a moment. To consider what it means, what it feels like to be seen, as opposed to the times when we felt overlooked or ignored and pigeonholed. To know that someone who has seen the real self, hidden underneath and still manages to love and accept us. What a profound difference that makes in our lives, in our hearts, in our self-image. Can we do less when we seek to engage the community around us?

Because he sees and has compassion, because he knows that it is God's will that all be gathered into the loving arms of grace, Jesus calls the twelve.
(pause) something significant is going on. According to Matthew anyway, Jesus calls the twelve in order for them to be those laborers that are so few. The community isn't called together for their own sake. The twelve aren't called in order to tend to their own souls, to make sure they are right with God. No, they are called to go out, to be the church that sees the crowds.