

Text: Matthew 9:37-38

³⁶When [Jesus say the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Theme: Hearts for the Harvest

At our South Wisconsin District Convention in 2022 our district passed a resolution entitled, “TO BUILD A DIVERSE DISTRICT THAT IS UNITED IN CHRIST.” It was passed by 78% of the delegates. Has anyone ever heard of that resolution? My guess is that the answer is probably not many of you. We are often good at talking about missions and evangelism and reaching out to people who are different from us, but what we do is often another thing. In these verses however, our Lord encourages us to have “Hearts for the Harvest.”

- I. Having hearts for the harvest begins with realizing that our Lord Jesus Christ died and rose for all people.

Here are just a few Scriptures on that:

- Isaiah 11:10, “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the people; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.”
- Galatians 3:26-29, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heir according to the promise.”
- Revelation 7:9, “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”

Peter expressed it well when he said that he realized that God accepts people of every nation who fear Him and do what is right. The harvest that God seeks is people from every nation on earth.

- II. As I think of the history of our Lutheran churches in our city, I can think of a lot of examples of ways that God sent workers into His harvest fields.

Here are a few examples:

- In 1896 a group of Lutherans wanted to provide an alternative to overcrowded orphanages in Milwaukee. They started an organization, which is today Lutheran Counseling and Family services, to care for these children.
- That organization led to Bethesda Lutheran Homes in 1904 to serve people with cognitive disabilities. That organization is now Ablelight.
- That led to the Lutheran Special School to serve children with special needs in the 1950’s, which is now Journey’s Lutheran School.
- In 1906 the Lutheran Home was established.
- Throughout the last 150 years dozens of Lutheran grade schools, high schools, and a college were established in Milwaukee. They have educated a growing number of

minority children as our neighborhoods have changed in Milwaukee, including the school that we are meeting at today. (Granville Lutheran School)

- Did you know that since about the year 1915, we have had the only chaplain at the House of Correction?
- For over 100 years we have had a deaf congregation in Milwaukee.
- We reach out to women with crisis pregnancies through A Place of Refuge.
- The SOS Center serves children in the inner city of Milwaukee.
- We have reached out to many new immigrant groups, and now have the first Kareni pastor.
- We have ministries to students, including foreign students at many of our universities in Wisconsin.

150 years ago, all of our congregations were German immigrants. Today we have congregations that are primarily African American, African Immigrant, Hmong, and Hispanic. There are so many opportunities that God has given to us to work in His harvest fields.

III. Yet, we have not always been faithful.

At times congregations have not welcomed people who were different in some way into our congregations. Congregations have sometimes moved rather than to engage the new people of their neighborhoods. We have failed to train enough ethnic and racially diverse workers in our seminaries and colleges. Several of our congregations in the neediest areas of our city have closed. In too many ways we have failed to embrace all of God's children in Christ. Are there people whom we currently would not want to walk through the door of our churches?

IV. The good news is that our Lord is a forgiving God.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26 Paul tells the Corinthians to consider what they were like when God called them. Paul answers the question in Romans 5:6,7 where he writes that we were powerless, ungodly, sinners. But as it says in our text Christ had compassion on us because we were like sheep without a shepherd. While we were still sinners Christ died for us. He called us to follow Him as our Savior. He washed away our sin, and made us into the children of God. The greatest bond that we have with anyone else in this world is our faith in Jesus Christ. No matter what differences we have, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. There might even be a variety of ways that we worship the Lord because of our diversity, but that is something to be celebrated.

God's love is so great that when we have not been welcoming to Christians, who are different from us, He forgives us and gives us new opportunities to work in His harvest fields. After Peter failed the Lord, our Lord continued to use him when He told Peter, "Feed my sheep." Peter had learned from those past failures. There have been times when each of us have been uncaring and unwelcoming, and yet the Lord continued to use us. I remember a situation at our church several years ago when a scruffy man showed up at my office door. I was busy and thought that he just wanted some cash. I told him to come back the next day. To my surprise, he did, and he became a beloved member of our congregation. As Christians we rejoice in the forgiveness of Christ and the new opportunities that God continues to give to us.

V. God continues to bless us with new opportunities.

There are so many opportunities that we have to share the Gospel today. So many of our churches are in places where people live, who were not traditionally Lutheran. Many of those churches are in the neediest parts of the city. People are coming to our country from the whole world. One of today's biggest opportunities is families with children with special needs. Such families really need to know that they are welcome in the church and in worship. The harvest is indeed plentiful.

In addition, we are blessed with many programs in our synod to prepare both pastoral and lay leaders. I think of the "Delto guys," a great group of laymen at Mission of Christ and other congregations, who were trained through the lay ministry program. We have EIIT pastors, such as Pastors Moua Vang, Blong Vang, Gui Kasongo, Elijah Ndon, and Afam Ikanih. Pastor Faiv Neng Her went through the Delto program. There are pastors in the Specialized ministry program, such as Sam Lee. Pastors Germán Novelli-Oliveros and David Blass were recently prepared through the Center for Hispanic Studies. We have been very blessed to have second generation pastors who have recently graduated from seminary, including Daniel Reh, Daniel Vang, and Joel Her. The tools are there for ethnic and specialized ministries. Our district convention gave its full support to using them. We pray that we will find and train men and women to serve in leadership roles in our congregations.

The harvest is plentiful. Do we have hearts that desire, not to just share the Gospel, but that we will be brothers and sisters in Christ with people who are very different from us? God has given us the tools. He has given us the Gospel, and He will answer our prayers for workers to proclaim that Gospel.

May God grant us hearts for the harvest that desire that our congregations are places where all people are honored as full brothers and sisters in Christ to the glory of our Savior, who has redeemed us all.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard - Benediction Lutheran Church
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