

Pentecost 2 6/14/20
Matthew 9:35-10:8 6A

“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”.

“Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers,” our Lord Christ says, because the “harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (vv. 37-38). People need to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because believing in Jesus is the only way to get into heaven. And that makes for a plentiful harvest. But, Jesus points out the problem with that: the laborers are few. If anyone knows that Jesus is talking about, it’s us. It’s our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Let me tell you what I’m talking about. Every April, our two seminaries have what is called “Call Day”. On Call Day, the 4th-year seminarians, having been instructed in the classroom, examined by the faculty and found to be fit for the pastoral office are issued a call to their first congregations. Thirty years ago, when I received a call to be the pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Edgeley, ND, **80** laborers were sent into the harvest by our Fort Wayne Seminary. BTW, I did try to find out how many the St. Louis seminary placed that year, but I couldn’t find the exact number. But, I can tell you this – 1990 marked an interesting footnote in the history of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, because it was the first year that anyone could recall that Fort Wayne placed more pastors into the harvest field than St. Louis. This year, 2020, Fort Wayne placed 40 laborers – [including our favorite seminarian, Josh](#) -- and St. Louis placed 56 laborers into the harvest field. I should let you know that we in the North Dakota District had 3 calling congregations, all of whom received pastors.

I don't want to appear nostalgic -- I'm making a point here -- so let me tell you about my seminary class. The president of the Fort Wayne Seminary himself is a classmate, as well as 3 district presidents, 2 professors, and the executive director of the Office of National Mission for the Synod. They all came from the class of 1990, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN. But, I should also tell you that within a short period of time, like a year or 18 months after graduation, we had about 10 that resigned or were removed from the ministry. In addition, we had several, many in fact, that were second career, and a number of those men have passed away. I have not kept in close contact with all of my classmates, but I went to my class composite picture on my study wall and looked at their names and faces. Honestly, I hadn't thought about some of those guys in a long time. Out of curiosity, I went to Synod's website and was surprised to find out how many were not even on the clergy roster of the Synod anymore. My point being this: even though 80 of us entered the ministry 30 years ago, there are not 80 serving in the Lord's harvest field today.

You don't have to be a mathematical genius to see that we are sending a lot fewer graduates into the harvest field than in years past. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (v. 37). What can be done about it? The Lord's Church is doing something about it. A whole lot of effort is being done to raise the number of laborers working in the harvest fields. Admission counselors from our two seminaries are traveling across the United States, encouraging men to come to the seminary to study to become pastors and missionaries, and women to become deaconesses. Compelled by the love of Christ, congregations of the Synod, like you dear saints, are being very generous with their dollars. The dear ladies of our

North Dakota are sending their mites to our students from North Dakota. With this financial support, tuition is now free at our seminaries. In addition to your support of our Fort Wayne seminary, you, as a congregation, have sent scholarship money to students, as you did to Josh. All of this is being done so that students can graduate without a mountain of debt, as they were doing back in my day.

These are all wonderful things for the Church to be doing. But, Jesus' words teach us that the sending out of workers begins and ends with prayer. "Pray earnestly," Jesus says. Boldly and confidently, Jesus teaches us to go to God's throne of grace, to send out laborers into His harvest.

We need them. We need pastors. We need deaconesses and missionaries. We need teachers in our parochial schools. And, we need other workers, as well. We need congregational officers. We need LWML officers and members. We need Sunday School and Catechism teachers, folks to run Vacation Bible School. We need fathers as head of their households to pray with their children and teach them God's Word. We need laborers to tell others about Jesus.

But, the laborers are few, because we have **not** prayed earnestly, boldly, and confidently enough that the Lord of the harvest would send out workers. Oh sure, we have all kinds of excuses. I forgot. I don't have the time. Prayer, ah, it doesn't work anyway. And my all-time favorite: Isn't that the pastor's job? All these excuses cannot overlook the fact that you've ignored the Lord's command to pray for laborers to be sent into the harvest.

The GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that we are forgiven, for not praying for laborers in the harvest. We are forgiven because God sent His

only-begotten Son into this world, born of human mother. And the very Son of God hung on the cross, to take all the punishment we deserve for not praying for laborers and for all our sins. As hung on that cross, Jesus even prayed for us, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

God the Father hears and answers Jesus' prayer, and He does forgive us for the sake of His Son. And, He gives us that forgiveness, that life, that salvation, His Son won for us in the new birth of our baptism.

The Evangelist tells us that as Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, "He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (v. 36).

Baptized and living in Jesus, we have the heart and mind of Christ, and that means we see others with the compassion of Christ Himself. We see that the harvest is plentiful. We see a Muslim, and see a lost sheep. We see someone whose skin color is different from ours and whose first language may not be English, and we see a lost sheep. We see someone involved in drunkenness, drugs, a promiscuous or homosexual lifestyle, and we see a lost sheep. We see someone who has been nasty, cruel, hurtful towards us, and we see a lost sheep.

St. Paul taught us what it means to have the compassion of Christ:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Cor 1:3-4).

Jesus comforts us, doing His work in us so that He can do His work through us. As Christ has had mercy on us and does His work in us, we are Christ to our neighbor. We invite them to church. We tell them what

hope the Easter resurrection gives us and how joyful we are that we are going to heaven when we die. We share with them how Jesus gives us strength for today.

The harvest is plentiful, My Dear Friends in Christ, so we pray earnestly for workers and have the heart of compassion of Christ Himself.