

Pentecost 3 6/18/23
Matthew 9:35-10:8 6A

WHEN HE SAW THE CROWDS, HE HAD COMPASSION FOR THEM, BECAUSE THEY WERE HARASSED AND HELPLESS, LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD.

Have you ever been lost? Or even worse, has your child, grandchild, or even parent gotten lost?

I remember well one beautiful Sunday afternoon. My dog and I were out enjoying Gpd's good creation; mainly looking for the male pheasant in order to shoot them. In the twinkling of an eye, Bandit took off running after something and before I could even call him back, he has gone – and I mean gone. The next frantic hours were filled with anger and fear, as I called and tried to buzz him on his electronic collar. Darkness was setting in, so I mopped my way back to the pickup trying to come up with a plan to search for him the next day. When I got closer to the truck, there he was sitting next to the driver's door, panting away, with the “where you been boss?” look on his face. I hugged that little dog, not knowing if I should smack him one or sit right down on the ground and cry. And that – that – was just my dog!

“He saw.” Jesus saw. What splendid Good News there is in those few words, My Friends in Christ. He saw us and compassion on us, because we were lost, “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

We are like sheep without a shepherd. We love the image the Bible gives us that we are the sheep of His pasture. But I remind you, that to be compared to a sheep is not exactly a compliment. Here's why I say that: Sheep may not be the smartest of animals, but their intelligence is not their biggest weakness. Sheep have only 21 feet of vision. They literally cannot

see what is right in front of them. They can't see a wolf; or a coyote; they can't see a hole, a cliff, that cannot see danger staring them right in the face. And when that predator comes, they have no natural defenses against them. They don't have big fangs and a crushing jaw. They don't have razor sharp claws. They're not fleet of feet to just run away, like a gazelle. They're just ... sheep.

Do you ever feel like a little lamb? On this side of heaven, we are like lost, little lambs facing many dangers.

We struggle with temptation. One of the loud voices that harasses us today is, "If it feels good, do it," and if we hurt our neighbor by it, well, that's their problem.

We struggle with finances. A dollar just doesn't go far today. With easy credit, we can get ourselves in over our heads before we know it, especially with the "keeping up with the neighbors" temptation before us. Just because your neighbor got a new toy, you have to have it too, right?

Sickness and infirmity seem to be a large part of our lives. We just finish one medication the doctor gives us, and off we go to see the doctor again, because something else hurts. Even worse, is when a spouse, or grandchild is sick, and you are helpless to do anything about it.

Then there are the natural disasters in our lives. It is beautiful to see the countryside green, but the droughts of recent years are not that distant in our memories. Smoke drifting south from wildfires burning across Canada have left us with hazy skies and even unhealthy air quality levels in some places. And remember I'm on your side, so it may seem awfully hot today, but you better make sure you have ready access to your snow blower – this is North Dakota, after all.

And, crime. Crime today. The Bismarck police department reported that property crimes against property were down, crimes against people rose, driven by increases in homicides and a big jump in aggravated assaults. Shootings leave us wondering if its safe to send our kids to school or even go to the mall. Oh, then there is the email or phone call asking you for your credit card numbers or account numbers, to scam you out of your money.

Life in this valley of the shadow of death harasses us and we are helpless. The GOOD NEWS for us is that our Good Shepherd saw us and had compassion for us.

You may recall a parable Jesus told about a father who had two sons. The younger son -- he was a rascal, to say it politely. He wanted his money before his dad even died. His father gave it to him and he wasted it in prodigal living. He repented and went home to dad. Do you remember what his dad did? "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Lk 15:20). That father had compassion for his son.

We often call that parable "The Prodigal Son". But, I think we should call it "The Forgiving Father," because it's not so much about that rascal of a son, Jesus is teaching us about our Father in heaven. Even though we have turned our back on Him, He has compassion on us. In fact, His love is so great that He sent His only-begotten Son to save us from all the threatening perils of sin.

The very Son of God took on human flesh and dwelt among us. He didn't come to merely suffer with us, to tell us how bad we've got it. Jesus came to suffer for us. The Prophet Isaiah says it this way, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Is 53:4).

Jesus took the pain, the misery, the grief -- all that sin has cast upon us -- upon Himself and carried it to the cross. On that cross, He suffered all the punishment that we, the ungodly, deserved. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for sheep who love to wander, and because He did, we are forgiven all our sins of thought, word, and deed. And, He rose the third day, defeating our last and greatest enemy, death itself.

And He gives us all the forgiveness, that victory, all that life He won for us in the new birth of our Baptism. In that blessed washing, we die to sin and rise to live in Christ.

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 them as sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless among the many dangers of this world. We see that the harvest is plentiful. We see a Mormon or 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, as we hear and learn His Word and eat and drink His life-giving Body and Blood, so that He can do His work through us so that we can be 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. Especially, on Father's Day, we remember the love and compassion of our earthly fathers, how in caring for us, they were a reflection of our Father in heaven.

The harvest is plentiful, My Dear Friends in Christ, so we see with the eyes of Jesus and have the heart of compassion of Christ Himself.