

***Matthew 9:35-10:8.*** <sup>35</sup> *Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.* <sup>36</sup> *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* <sup>37</sup> *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.* <sup>38</sup> *Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."* He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. <sup>2</sup> *These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. <sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*

***In Compassion God Sends out Ministers of His Word.***

***1. He calls ministers to be faithful shepherds.***

***2. He hears our prayer for more workers.***

On Friday, Americans were able to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. It is our annual celebration of unity and fireworks and a day of appreciation for what makes our land great. We give thanks for the freedom that we have. We give thanks to God for the brave men who established our land and the brave men and women who protect those freedoms still today. Yes, as we grill out and gather in appreciation for this great land of ours it is certainly fitting that we ask God to continue to bless the USA.

When taking an honest look at America today it is clear that we need to ask for God's blessing and we need to pray for this dear country of ours. Not just because of a floundering economy, or a corrosive political divide, but the erosion of spiritual life in America is worthy of our prayers. A look at just some of the numbers recently compiled concerning faith in America can be quite troubling. A survey taken less than 5 years ago showed that 46 million Americans now say that they did not identify with any religion. This number has swelled significantly in the past 10 years and perhaps most striking is that one-third of Americans under the age of 30 have no religious affiliation. (*NPR: "Losing our Religion": January 13, 2013*) Within the past year a Gallup poll has been taken which reported that 30% of Americans view religion as old fashioned and out of date. To put it in perspective only 7% of Americans held that position in 1957. (*National Journal: "For Most Americans, Religion is the Answer to Today's Problems": June 27, 2014*)

When considering the spiritual state of our country a person might think of the words before us today. As Jesus went through all the towns and villages there were many people that were indifferent to or ignorant of spiritual matters. He looked upon the crowds as saw them as shepherdless sheep wandering through life on their way toward hell. He looked at them and he had compassion on them. So he went throughout the big towns and small villages preaching to the people and teaching them about the kingdom of God. In compassion he also then sent his disciples to preach and to teach and to help the people of his nation.

In a similar way, many in America today seem to be wandering about like sheep without a shepherd. Many are looking for direction in life, looking for something to grab onto, and many don't find much. Young men and women, as well as people who are no longer young but who are still drifting through life, have never found the answers that they have been looking for. And so young and old wander in all sorts of directions. Many wander into the vices of the day. Drugs and alcohol and a good night out become the source of pleasure and purpose but also the source of trouble and regret. Many people in our county lose themselves in work and pour their soul into business only to find that happiness can't be bought. A comfortable life and plenty of things does not guarantee peace and joy and satisfaction. Even those who seek to find their meaning in their family are often left disappointed and heartbroken when the problems of this world collide with their family life. Some people do seek spiritual guidance, but are misled and deceived by the false teachers, the false shepherds, of our day.

Harassed by sin and trouble and very much helpless to save ourselves, God sees all of us and has compassion on us. He sees those who wander through life without knowing him. He sees us who are his sheep but who also love to wander. He sees all of us and has compassion for each and every one of us.

Our Savior sees the people of this world, he sees the people of this nation, and in compassion he sends out workers to tend to our spiritual needs. Our Savior who willingly died for us, in love and compassion sends ministers of his word to reach out to the lost and straying and bring his words of salvation. In love and compassion his sends ministers of his Word to give us his words of peace as the LORD Jesus leads us to his cross. He sends his words of forgiveness and eternal life to us through his faithful ministers. Through these servants our Lord reaches out to those who are lost and wandering as well as those he has gathered securely into his fold. Through the blessed gift of the ministry our Lord graciously offers and gives comfort and care, direction and purpose, as well as lasting joy and happiness.

The gospel ministry is a tremendous blessing that God has given especially to the people of this country. In big towns and small villages throughout the United States there are many congregations with faithful pastors and teachers. We have our faithful God to thank for that, for this gospel ministry finds its source in God's compassion. As one examines the ministry it is apparent that the ministry has been established not so much with the worker in mind, but God had his people in mind. *Who will tend to my*

people? Who will calm their troubled hearts, and apply the gospel to their lives? Who will ease their troubled consciences and direct them in the way that they should go? Who will preach and teach the saving word to the people of this world and guide those who believe in Jesus through the wilderness of this existence? In his compassion God sends out ministers of his gospel. Spiritual leaders, pastors, teachers, lay leaders, are all gifts from God's hand so that his people are cared for.

As Jesus sent his disciples out, it was done in compassion. It was for the sake of the lost sheep of Israel. He sent out his disciples so that they could tend to the needs of the people. He sent them to preach and to teach, to rebuke and forgive, to heal and to save.

In love he sent them out to serve others. But the temptation must have been there to serve themselves. The attention that they received, the praise that they must have been given, may have easily gone to their heads. The ability to cast out demons, to speak with authority about what God's Word had to say, to be the right hand men of Jesus the Christ, and to even raise the dead these are all things that were wonderful blessings from the Lord Jesus, but when misused could have easily fed into a number of sins such as: sinful pride and greed. And we know that in one case it did. Judas Iscariot in sinful greed would betray Jesus.

Some ministers, even faithful ministers for a time, forget that the ministry is really not about them but it is about the people. Faithful service is betrayed for the sake of praise and control. In greed, or lust for power, ministers are tempted to forget or neglect their responsibility to the people. It happens; and it happens because ministers are sinners too. And then because it has happened in the past, people, even church going Christians can become so jaded or guarded against the ministers that they take them for granted or think that the minister is just always out for his own gain. And the sad thing of all of this is that when this does happen, the gospel ministry malfunctions and does not serve the purpose for which God established it. God's people are not cared for like God intended.

God wants his ministers to gladly and faithfully serve the needs of his people. He wants servants who have known the love of God to share that love with others. This is what Jesus sent his disciples out to do. This is why he encouraged them with this simple phrase, "***Freely you have received, freely give.***" They were to do these amazing things out of thanks to God. They were to go out and preach and teach about the love of God in Christ Jesus for the benefit of the people and to the glory of God. As a minister of the gospel these are powerful words that speak to me as a wonderful encouragement as I seek to faithfully serve God's people.

But our Lord does not only speak to the minister in these verses but he speaks to the layman, the person in the pew, the everyday Christian, for he says, "***The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.***" The Lord looks out at the masses of people that are wandering and drifting in the winds of unbelief and indifference and he compares it to a field of grain that is ready for the harvest. For when grain has reached that point, it must

be harvested; otherwise it will fall to the ground and go to waste. (People's Bible: page 141). And so in his great love Jesus makes this simple request of his disciples, he makes this simple request of you, ***“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”***

God has a desire to gather his people to himself. He has a desire to seek out and save the lost and the straying. He has a desire to surround the people of this world with his love and care and to save sinners from eternal destruction. He is filled with this wonderful compassion to save, and he includes us in this marvelous rescue mission. He includes you in a very simple way: pray. Pray for workers. It is a simple thing, but Satan wants you to think it is unnecessary, or a waste of your time. Your sinful flesh may see it as an unwanted burden and it says, *“Let someone else do it.” “Someone else must be doing it already, why should I have to bother?”* But dear friends, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Pray for workers. We have this opportunity to play a part in this work of salvation. Pray for workers to go out into the world, pray for workers to go out to the people of America.

We praise God that many have prayed this prayer and we praise God that he continues to answer this prayer among us. We praise God that he continues to raise up spiritual leaders from among his people. We thank God for the graduates from Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary that were recently placed into congregations throughout the world and this great nation. In his faithfulness God has called these young men from the Seminary to be shepherds for his people. But it should be noted that this was one of the smallest classes to graduate from the Seminary in years. Dear friends, there is a great need. The harvest is plentiful. There are plenty of places where the gospel can spread and grow in this county. There are plenty of people, millions of them in this country alone that are wandering through life like sheep without a shepherd. Pray for workers so that we may send out more pastors and teachers to new missions and established congregations throughout the country, so that the good news of Jesus is shared.

We thank God for the new teacher that he has seen fit to give to us here in Danube for our joint ministry at Little Lambs. And we pray for all the teachers who have recently been assigned from Martin Luther College and who are beginning to find their way and start their work at their new schools. May the Lord encourage them in their efforts, keep them from being overwhelmed or discouraged, and may he bless their efforts so that the gospel is proclaimed to many more souls who are dearly loved by God.

On this weekend as we pause to give thanks for the freedoms that we have take time to give thanks for the ministry of the gospel. Ask God to do more wonders of grace among us that he would continue to provide us with faithful ministers of his Word. And pray that he would continue to send out more workers, more faithful preachers and teachers and leaders that the word may go out into the world and to the people of this great nation, so that many more might know the love and compassion of our dear Savior. Dear friends, pray for workers, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few!