

The 2nd Sunday after Pentecost. The scripture text is taken from Matthew 9:35-38

William McRae writes: "Years ago, some researchers decided to find out if seminary students are Good Samaritans. They met individually with 40 ministerial students under the pretense of doing a study of careers in the church.

Each student was instructed to walk to a near-by building to deliver an impromptu talk into a tape recorder. Some were told to talk on the Good Samaritan parable, while others were told to talk about their career concerns.

Meanwhile the researchers planted an actor along the path who, as a seminarian approached, groaned, and slumped to the ground. They found that more than half of the students walked right by!

The researchers noted, "Some who were planning their dissertation on the Good Samaritan, literally, stepped over the slumped body as they hurried along."

If you are like me, you are probably thinking, "How could these students, these future pastors, and these people who will work in the church, be so occupied with themselves and the immediate pressure they faced to deliver a talk, that they did not see the obvious need of this man in their path. They did not stop to help him, they did not see him as Jesus would have seen him.

So how did Jesus see people? Jesus saw lost people as distressed. The word, "distressed" means troubled or vexed. It points to the load of problems that people apart from Christ bear.

Do you ever look carefully into people's faces when you are in public? If you do, you will see some people who are distressed and troubled.

Jesus saw people as dispirited. The word, "dispirited", means down-cast or thrown-down. It points to utter helplessness and a forsaken condition of people who are lost in sin without the Savior.

Phillip Keller, in his book, "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23", describes how sheep can get turned over on their backs and are not able to get up by themselves again. Such sheep are called, "cast", or "cast down", Sheep.

These sheep flail at the air with their legs, but they can't get back on their feet without the aid of the shepherd. Left in this condition, helpless and vulnerable to their enemies, and if not helped, they will die after a few days.

What a picture of sinners apart from the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. These sinners may look calm and comfortable and successful in worldly terms, but Jesus sees their hearts before God. They're legs up, unable to extricate themselves from their sin. They are "down-cast or dispirited". They are without hope and without God.

Jesus saw lost people as sheep without a shepherd. The Jewish religious leaders should have been shepherding these people, pointing them to God, but instead, they were self-righteous and self-seeking, looking down on the common people as sinners.

These so called religious leaders, were fleecing the flock, not shepherding them with compassion. They view these common people as a bother, as trouble. But Jesus viewed them as sheep, needing a shepherd.

Years ago there was a heart rending story in the news (this story was cited by Charles Hembree). He writes: "A young father by the name of James Lee, shot himself in a tavern phone booth. Just

minutes before, he had called a reporter, and told him that he had sent the paper, an envelope outlining his story. The frantic reporter tried to trace his call, but it was too late. When the police arrived, the young man was slumped over with a bullet through his head.

In his pocket was a child's crayon drawing, much folded and worn. On it was written, "Please leave in my coat pocket. I want to have it buried with me". The drawing was signed in childish print by the man's daughter, Shirley, who had died in a fire, five months before.

The father had been so grief-stricken, that he had asked total strangers to attend his daughter's funeral, so that she would have a nice service.

He said there was no family to attend, since Shirley's mother had died when the child was two. And so when he called the reporter just before he took his life, James Lee said that all he had in life was gone and felt so alone."

When we hear such a heart-breaking story like that, most of us would respond with, "I would have shown love and would have helped this young man in anyway I could."

But the problem is, hurting people do not wear neon signs flashing the words: "I am in pain, I am hurting, help me!"

I am sure there are those here, in this very house of worship, this very morning, who are hurting in some way, so do we step over them to talk with our friends, or do we see them as Jesus sees them as distressed, dispirited, and lost without a shepherd?

Jesus said: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." This was an important concept that Jesus wanted His disciples to grasp.

On another occasion, after speaking with the Samaritan woman by the well, Jesus told His disciples, this is in John's Gospel, chapter 4, verse 35: "Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting."

Jesus also repeated it again as He sent the seventy out for the task of ministry. There was a harvest waiting to be reaped, the harvest doesn't depend on our ability, but on God's sovereign purposes. God has planned a harvest, and He calls us to get involved.

The sad truth is, we practically deny the truth of Jesus' words, whenever we think: "He or she wouldn't want to hear the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He or she might be offended if I talk to him or her about spiritual things."

But how do you know that? Jesus reminds us that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. It's God's job to open the hearts and the minds of people to the gospel, it's our job, our calling, our task, to go out into the world, (the mission field) and to reap the harvest.

So Jesus saw the great need of lost people. He saw the great harvest of lost people. Now here in verse 37, Jesus changes metaphors. In verse 36, Jesus used the metaphor of the lost as sheep.

But now, it is a harvest. These two metaphors show two sides of the coin. The sheep and the shepherd show man's need met by God. The good shepherd seeks out the lost sheep and ministers to them.

The harvest and the workers (laborers) show God's need met by man. God uses saved people (like you and I) to reach out to the un-saved, those who do not know Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Jesus' view point is that of a farmer, who has a great crop ready for harvest, but He doesn't have enough workers to help gather in the harvest.

This is an interesting picture isn't it? On the one hand, the Lord will accomplish all of His purposes, which include the salvation of His elect. And yet, at the same time, God has chosen to save the lost through those whom He has saved, that would be you and I.

God chose us, since the harvest is plentiful, and that means that there is a need for more workers to go out into the field to bring in that harvest.

We, you and I, are the sheep of Jesus, and Jesus wants us to be those workers in God's harvest. And it is not by accident, that the very next thing in Matthew's Gospel, that Jesus summons the twelve Apostles and appoints them for ministry.

Up to this point, Jesus has done all of the ministry, while the disciples have been watching from the side-lines, following Jesus all around, now it's time for the disciples to jump in, roll their sleeves up, and get to work.

Now some of you may be thinking: "But Pastor, I hear what Jesus is saying, but I am not called to full time ministry, it's all I can do to make it here on time on Sunday morning. Besides, I can't just drop what I am doing in my life, to go out and evangelize, I have a family to take care of and bills to pay, do you know hectic my life is?"

Folks, the workers in the Lord's harvest are not just those in "full-time" ministry. Through God's baptismal grace, you and I have been saved, we have been forgiven of our sins and the given the promise unto everlasting life, with God our Father in heaven.

Our salvation is secure. Christ Jesus has taken care of that, through the work of the blood-stained cross and His resurrection over sin, death and the devil.

Through our calling as disciples, we are called to share the good news of Christ, and to make disciples, who will in turn go out and make other disciples.

You don't have to be a pastor, or a theologian, or hold a master's degree in theology. God will use you at whatever place you are in your life.

If you are a student in school, live your faith, let your faith lead you and guide you, be an example for others to emulate. Be the best student you can be.

If you work at a job, live your faith, let your faith lead you and guide you, be an example for others to emulate. Be the best employee you can be.

Ministry, is not a "stained-glass" word that applies only to those called into professional Christian work. As your Pastor, my calling is "service" in the name of Christ.

As a "lay-person" in the congregation, guess what? This applies to you as well. Every Christian is called to serve Christ.

God has given each and everyone of us, unique gifts, talents, and opportunities. You are to take what God has given to you, by His grace, and to use it, to serve those people, whom God has put in your life, those whom you have or will come into contact with.

Not everyone is called to go to seminary, so as to become a pastor, or a missionary, or a chaplain in some form of specialized ministry such as that to the military, or to serve in a hospital or in a

prison, or wherever. God raises up those people and opens the door for them, and they go and serve wherever God needs them.

Now this is important, not all of us are called to preach in the pulpit Sunday after Sunday, but we are called, to share the gospel, (when the opportunity presents itself) so that those who are living in spiritual darkness, in spiritual ignorance, will know that they can free from the bondage of sin, have their sins forgiven, and be given the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

So what should motivate us to share the gospel of Jesus Christ? Our motivation should be the great love of our Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord, who came into this sinful world, who saw the great needs of those who are lost, who felt compassion for them, and who served them with the good news of salvation.

You and I have experienced the love of God, through His grace imparted to you and to me through our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, you and I, are one His workers in His harvest.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, wants you to see as He sees, He wants you to feel as He feels, He wants you to do as He does, and that is to love the lost as He has.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, by faith, let's roll up our sleeves, and go to work, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, for Christ calls us to do so. Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God, You sent your Son into this world to point us to You, to be in a relationship with you, as a beloved son or daughter in the faith. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to be an imitator of Christ in our day to day lives, so as to reach out to those who do not know you as Lord and Savior, help us to be workers in your harvest, as the day of Christ's return draws near. All these we humble pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.