

He had Compassion on Them

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Third Sunday after Pentecost) is Matthew 9:35-10:8. This text is about Jesus modeling caring ministry and commissioning disciples to participate in this ministry.

Mt 9:35 is the back end of a bracket that Matthew has placed around the entire section from 4:23 to now. Jesus, the Messiah of word and deed, has spoken grace and truth with authority in Israel (especially chapters 5–7), and he has been doing deeds of mercy with that same rightful power (especially chapters 8–9). Some have been called to be disciples. Many in the crowds are marveling, but most do not believe. And some—the Pharisees—have begun to set themselves in violent opposition to Jesus and to the reign of God. Despite this varied response, Jesus remains true to his ministry of compassion and salvation, and he keeps on traveling in Israel, fulfilling his purpose.

Now, however, he will choose twelve from the larger group of his disciples and uniquely commission them to share in his authority and to extend his work to Israel's lost sheep. Following a narrative introduction (9:36–10:4), Jesus will send out the Twelve for their mission work (10:5–42). To the account of why and how Jesus sends them, the Gospel's narrative has now arrived.

Teaching, preaching, healing sum up Jesus' entire ministry in Galilee and echoes Mt. 4:23. At this point Jesus focused on the lost sheep of Israel, teaching in their synagogues.

When our text says that Jesus *had compassion* it refers to the inner organs – heart, kidneys, liver, intestines, lungs – and later spoke of them as the seat of emotions such as anger and anxious desire. The Latin literally means to “suffer with, to feel the pain and suffering of another.” Compassion comes from identifying closely with another.

To be *harassed* means to be flayed – skin torn off which sometimes happened when sheep go through brambles or rocks. Being *helpless* is to be prone or exhausted. When sheep have a lot of wool on them it is easy for them to fall and not be able to get back up.

There are plenty in our world who are harassed and helpless including us at various times. Thankfully Jesus continues to have compassion on all his people. He never leaves us or forsakes us.

Jesus used an agricultural metaphor to picture (harvest is plentiful) the many people who needed to hear the Gospel. There are still many, many more people who need the news that the Good Shepherd died for the sins of the world.

The plentiful harvest continues to require our prayers for workers today. It also calls us to bear witness ourselves.

Prayer: Good Shepherd, thank you for having compassion on me and bringing me into your kingdom. Make me a faithful witness, and bless my every effort to enlarge our flock. Amen. (TLSB)