

Our Shepherd And His Servants

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel according to Matthew, chapters 9, verse 35, to chapter 10, verse 8, as printed in your liturgy.

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew. Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Jesus called his twelve disciples to him, and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits, and to heal every disease and sickness.

[1 : 25] 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. Philip and Bartholomew.

Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector. James, the son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus. Simon the Zealot. And Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions. Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.

As you go, proclaim this message. The kingdom of heaven has come near. Heal the sick. Raise the dead. Cleanse those who have leprosy.

Drive out demons. Freely you have received. Freely give. This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Christ.

[2 : 26] Good morning, Christ Church. We are just exploring together the gospel of Matthew. And you may be aware that in the gospel of Matthew, there are five major sermons of Jesus.

Five big blocks of Jesus preaching and his teaching. If you look in your pew Bibles, you can verify this, that chapters five to seven of this gospel is the sermon on the mount or the sermon on the Christian life.

And then you turn to our text today, Matthew 10, which is the sermon on Christian mission. And then you turn to chapter 13, that's the sermon on the kingdom of God and Jesus' parables about what the kingdom of God is like.

And then if you turn to chapters 18 to 20, it's the sermon on the church, the sermon on the church community. And then if you look at chapters 23 to 25, it's Jesus' sermon on judgment.

And really, there's nothing more important for Christians and for churches today than to learn the contents of these sermons at the feet of Jesus.

[3 : 32] And as he urged us last week in the sermon on the mount, not just to hear his words, but to put them into practice and to order our lives under these sermons.

If you're here today and you're exploring the Christian faith, these sermons, I would say, is just Jesus Christ 101, basic Christianity. And I hope it helps you in your process of exploration.

We spent the last three weeks looking at the sermon on the Christian life. And today we're focusing our attention on Jesus' sermon on Christian mission.

And Christian mission begins and ends with Jesus' heart for people, with Jesus' love for people.

That's what the red-hot center of the church is supposed to be, is the compassion of Christ himself.

And we see that in verse 35 of this text. It says that Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness.

[4 : 33] Jesus was an itinerant preacher and a healer. And he had his base of operations in a town called Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel.

And from there he went all over the place. We can see in this verse that Jesus is on the move. He's among people. He has his eyes open to their needs.

And he's eager to reach as many people as possible. And how can you tell if you are an authentic disciple of Christ and in a healthy church of Christ, well, you share that same eagerness to reach more and more people with the gospel of the kingdom of God.

It's far too easy for churches to become ingrown and turned in on themselves and their own concerns instead of being outward-looking, outward-facing disciples of Jesus in and for our cities. And that's why the mission of Christ Church ends with those words, for the city, because we aspire to share in Jesus' own ministry for our city.

[5 : 39] But what is Jesus doing here? It says that he's doing two things with his words and his deeds. First of all, he's enthusiastically announcing the good news of the kingdom of God with his words.

And then secondly, he's therapeutically relieving people's misery with his deeds. And isn't that what Jesus' disciples and churches should be doing today?

This news that Jesus is sharing is the best news that anyone could hope to hear. It's the kind of news that's so great. It's like the announcement of the end of a terrible war.

This terrible war is finally over. And it's that kind of news is the kind of news that makes people dance in the streets, you know, hug complete strangers. And that's what Jesus is going around sharing.

He's saying that the creator God has sent his son as the king to rule this world and to triumph over evil, to set the world to rights, so that the creation can finally flourish again in all of its fullness.

[6 : 43] And as Jesus is sharing this news, he's urging people to accept it. He's warning people about the dire consequences of ignoring it. But he's got a ministry not only of the word, he's got a ministry of deed.

He's not just a preacher, he's also a healer. He's not just teaching, he's also touching. He's touching people at their point of need and their point of pain and misery.

You can imagine Jesus like a doctor and he's sitting there with people listening to them, diagnosing them, treating them, curing them and restoring them and conquering over all that's dehumanizing them.

Jesus is going around to all these places and he's giving them a good infection, right? The good infection of his life in the midst of their sickness, and his health in the midst of their disease, and his hope in the midst of their despair.

Jesus goes around making people sound in their bodies and whole in their souls. And these are signposts that the presence and the power of God has come near.

[7 : 48] They're signposts that the new age is breaking into this world and that the coming day of Jesus' crucifixion and his resurrection is going to be a decisive defeat of all the sources of this misery, sin and evil and death and hell and the devil, that God in Jesus has begun to reign sovereignly and supremely through his only chosen king.

So that's our first verse today. And that sets the context for everything else I want to say to you.

This text really tells us that Christ's compassion leads to praying and working.

That's what our text is about today, that Christ's compassion leads to praying and working. And I want to say a little bit about Christ's compassion. What does Jesus see?

When he looks at the masses of men and women like ourselves, when he looks around at them the way that we might look around our city and our world, what does Jesus see?

Jesus is no mere man. He's the son of God. And so he has a different way of seeing. A different way of seeing people and their problems. He saw people and their problems in a way that's different than like our newspapers see people and their problems.

[9 : 10] What did he see? It says in verse 36, when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. That's a true word of our predicament.

A painful diagnosis of our condition that we are sheep. And if you're not insulted, you should be insulted because we like to think of ourselves as people who are folks of reason and logic, people who have brains and understanding.

And Jesus says, well, really, you're sheep. And as you might know, sheep are the most foolish of all creatures. If you talk to a shepherd, they'll tell you that sheep are not these clean, cuddly little lambs that they appear at a distance.

In fact, one sheep says this. He says, quote, sheep are dirty, subject to unpleasant pests. They need to be regularly dipped in strong chemicals in order to be rid of lice and ticks and worms. Sheep are unintelligent, wayward, obstinate beasts. We know that it's characteristic for sheep to run here and there, rushing after one another, not knowing where they're going or what they're doing. [10:26] And this is, of course, not the way that it was intended to be, but it is, in fact, what we've made of ourselves. We are sheep, Jesus says. And what does Jesus know about sheep?

He knows all the teachings of the Old Testament about sheep, particularly this verse in Isaiah 53, 6. It says, we all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. We've escaped our owner and our master. And we've gone off on our own. We're self-willed, self-centered creatures of pride who say, well, we don't really need God.

And because of this, we bring about a great deal of misery upon ourselves, don't we? We're harassed and helpless because of this. Because we've left God, we find ourselves distressed and dispirited.

It literally says, Jesus sees sheep who are mangled and thrown down to the ground. He sees sheep that are wounded and dejected. Sheep that are bruised and prostrate in utter misery.

[11:34] When Jesus looks at people like us, he says, oh my, they don't have enough food. And they're thin and they're weary and they're weak and they don't even know where to go and find nourishment.

And because they've gone out from the protection of the shepherd, these sheep have exposed themselves to predators, to thieves and to wolves that would come and take advantage of our situation and our condition.

And so Jesus, when he sees this crowd, he sees that they're sheep who are attacked and wounded and mangled and half killed. And maybe you're here today and you resonate.

You feel perplexed and you feel bewildered. Maybe you're a sheep today who's torn by sin and attacked by evil.

And the question for us is, why are we so desperate? And this text tells us we're desperate because we lack a shepherd. And that's an Old Testament way of saying that we have no prophet.

[12:41] We have no priest. We have no king who can guide us and lead us in God's way and tell us God's truth and show us where God wants us to go. Who is sufficient to shepherd us?

That's the question. Can the philosophers and the politicians shepherd us? Can they help us? No. No. They're just as lost as we are. They're lost sheep.

How about the theologians and the pastors? Right? Can they show us where we're supposed to go? Over the past century, pastors and theologians have given us modernist Christianity and pluralist Christianity and nationalist Christianity and postmodernist Christianity.

Has any of this helped the helpless sheep? No, it's made it worse. Who can tell us the meaning of life? Who can fix this world? Who can lead us through sin and death?

Jesus, when he sees people, he sees sheep. And what he knows is that we've gone our own way and that's why we're harassed and we're helpless.

[13:55] But what does Jesus feel when he encounters us? We're told in verse 36, when he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them. He felt compassion for them.

This is one of my favorite words in the Greek. The word is splachnizomai. And your splachna is your spleen. Right?

And what Jesus is feeling is that his bowels are turning and his intestines are churning and his heart is breaking in this moment. It's the same word that's used in Jesus' greatest story in Luke 15 when he's talking about this father who runs toward his prodigal son and he hugs him and kisses him and lavishes gifts upon him.

See, Jesus in this moment, when he's feeling compassion, he's not a sheep. Right? He's not part of the masses. He doesn't belong to the multitude of humanity.

He's entirely different. He's the eternal son of God. And he sees us dying. He sees that there's no one to help us, no one to lead us.

[15:05] And so he says, Father, send me. Send me, Father. I'll empty myself of my eternal glory. And I'll enter into this world of rebellion and sorrow and sin and death.

And I want you to send me to go and be a good shepherd who can rescue these lost sheep. And that English word, compassion. Passion, of course, means to suffer.

And compassion means to suffer with. And Jesus is saying, Father, send me to suffer with them and as them and for them. That I might be the shepherd to lay down my life for those sheep on the cross.

That I could bring them back to their rightful master, their rightful owner. That I could bring them into the sheep fold of the church where I can feed them with my word.

Where I can feed them with the truth. Where I can feed them with my body and my blood and give them my life. Friends, when Jesus sees you.

[16:09] In all your sin and suffering. In all of your wounds and your weakness spiritually and morally. How does he feel about you?

Splunk needs a mind is what he feels. His heart is breaking with love for you. And the question is, have you experienced the compassion of Christ?

Have you experienced it personally? Have you experienced it recently? Do you experience it regularly? He has a heart for you.

Yes, he considers you a sheep. But you're a precious sheep. You're a beloved sheep. And Jesus says you're worth suffering to save. You're worth dying to deliver.

That's the compassion of Christ. Christ. And Christ's compassion leads to praying. This tells us that Christ's compassion leads to praying.

[17:08] That Jesus sees our need. He sees that people without Christ are sheep without a shepherd. That they're going to run out of pasture and starve. They're going to get lost and caught in a thicket and die.

They're going to be attacked by thieves and wolves and be torn apart. And people that we see around us, they look put together. They seem self-confident. But through the eyes of Jesus, they're sheep who are harassed and helpless and distressed and dispirited.

Yes, they have gadgets. Yeah, they have money. But if you can see through all their self-reliance and self-assurance, Jesus says they're sheep without a shepherd who do not know the ultimate meaning of life.

And don't have a purified conscience before God and have no hope of eternal life. And the question for Christians and for the church is do we feel Jesus' compassion for our friends, our neighbors, and our colleagues who are in need of a shepherd?

Do we feel the love that Jesus Christ has for these others in our lives? Jesus longs for his disciples to see the potential that's all around us.

[18:19] And that's why he says in verse 37, The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. And he changes the metaphor here. He says people without Christ are not only desperate sheep, but they're a plentiful harvest.

And they're wheat that's ready to be reaped. Jesus says the harvest is huge. The harvest is ripe. And we need eyes, the eyes of Jesus to see people as sheep who are lost.

We need the heart of Jesus to feel his compassion as a shepherd. But we also need the imagination of Jesus who really, really wants to bring in a massive harvest.

The image here is of wheat being brought safely into the barn. And that's the image of people being brought safely into the kingdom of God.

People being brought out of unbelief and into faith. People being brought out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the sun God loves. And Jesus is sharing this image with us with a certain expectancy and a certain hope.

[19:26] And of course, we know that over the next three centuries after Jesus' resurrection, he would reap a great harvest. Half of the Roman Empire would come into his kingdom. And the question is, do we share in Jesus' expectancy?

As we're relating to the people around us who identify as agnostic and secular or humanist or Buddhist or Muslim or however they identify themselves, what do we imagine?

Do we imagine what Jesus is imagining? That they're wheat for the harvest. That they're people that need to be brought into the kingdom of God. And I think if we're honest, many of us are not really expecting that.

We're not really expecting people to come into a relationship with Christ and his church. We're not expecting people to become obedient to the faith of Jesus Christ. But what if we began to share in the expectant and hopeful imagination of Jesus?

And what if we really believed that the harvest is actually quite ripe and quite ready? That people are actually sheep that are dying to find a shepherd like Jesus?

[20 : 42] Jesus says the problem is not that the harvest is not plentiful. What is the problem? Jesus says the workers are few. And why are there so few reapers?

Because Jesus says we're not asking for it. We're not asking anything for the harvest. We're not asking for workers for the harvest. Jesus says ask the Lord of the harvest in verse 38.

Therefore to send out workers into his harvest field. Now that is not a command to form a committee. That's not a command to study a book.

It's a command that says simply call him. Ask him. Talk to him.

And what are we to ask for? Lord, give us eyes to see that there actually is a harvest. And give us eyes to see that that harvest is actually ripe and plentiful.

[21 : 43] And give us your passion and your enthusiasm for that harvest. And Lord, we're asking that you would send out. Literally the word is that you would thrust out Christians out of where they're comfortable.

Out to go into that harvest. And Lord, we're asking that you would change us and make us into workers. Make us into reapers. Make us people who would invite others to our tables and bring them to church to hear about Jesus.

And open our hearts to want to even share about our king and his kingdom. Open our mouths to even talk about our shepherd and how he lays down his life for the sheep.

Oh Lord, we're asking you. And if you look at the history of the church, you know, before God enables the church to bring in a great harvest, before that he always pours out his Holy Spirit to cause us to start asking more.

And that's how you know that God is going to send his power among his church is because the church has begun to engage itself in a new way in asking and in praying.

[22 : 55] Jesus is telling us, I want you to spend more time individually in your prayer closet and collectively in your prayer meetings talking about the harvest.

Now I have three pastoral petitions I'd like to ask of you right now. And before you say no, I'd love for you to only say no if you sense the Holy Spirit is telling you to say no.

In other words, try to say yes, okay? Here are my three pastoral petitions. Number one, I'd like to call you to pray and fast this week. Ideally on Wednesday, but whenever it works for you.

To skip breakfast or lunch or both. However God's leading you. And just to pray over this text. And as you pray to say, God, I want you more than I want food.

And God, I want this harvest more than I want my own comfort. That's my first petition. My second petition is that you'd come to our prayer meeting this Wednesday night at 7 o'clock.

[24 : 01] And I know some of you have conflicts and that's what's kept you from coming in the past. But I want to ask you to make an exception this Wednesday night. 7 o'clock, people come to these meetings.

They come to our prayer vigils and they say, gosh, why don't we do this more often? I'm so energized. I'm so encouraged. Why have we not been doing this?

Can't we do this more? And I say, yes, we can. But come Wednesday night, 7 o'clock, to our prayer meeting. Third thing I want to ask is that you'd come to our boiler room at 9.30 on Sunday mornings.

Which is where we simply just gather together and ask God to do things that aren't possible for us but that are possible for him. And if you all come next week, we won't have enough room for you. So space it out. And come sometime over the next month. But Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, ask and you'll receive. Seek and you'll find.

[24 : 56] Knock and the door will be opened to you. Which of you, if your child came to you and asked you for bread, would you give him a stone? And if they asked you for fish, would you give him a snake?

He says, no. If you then, though you are evil, know how to give really good gifts to your children, how much more does our Father in heaven know how to give really good gifts to those who simply ask him for it?

If you study the Acts of the Apostles, you'll see that the Christian mission was really born in the prayer meeting. Acts chapter 1 says that they all joined together constantly in prayer.

And that because of that, the Holy Spirit was poured out on them at Pentecost. Acts chapter 4 says that after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God more boldly.

If you're new today, don't be freaked out. It's just that Christ Church is in this season where we, and when I say we, I mean me, we're learning to pray more like Jesus.

[26 : 06] Just earnestly, passionately, zealously, wholeheartedly. We're trying to move beyond the ordinary prayers to extraordinary prayers that are united and persistent and kingdom-centered and Christ-commanded.

And we're not praying that God would bring in a harvest so that our church could be bigger or so that we could generate more money or so that we could really feel good about ourselves and pat ourselves on the back.

No. We're praying that people in our city, people on the campus at Cal and people in the East Bay would be sheep who come to know their good shepherd. They'd be wheat who'd be shepherd, they'd be wheat who'd be spread safely into the barn of this Lord of the harvest, that they would come and they would see his glory and that he would take them like wheat and turn them into bread and give more life to the world.

That's what we're praying for. And it all flows out of Christ's compassion because that's what he wants. That's what he wants. Christ's compassion leads to praying like he does.

and Christ's compassion not only leads to praying but it also leads to working and I'll end with this. Jesus does not say, okay, get out there and get to work because the work of harvesting without prayer and without God would be a total mess.

[27 : 27] Jesus says, no, I want you to fall on your faces before God in humble dependency and say, Lord, we're not sufficient, we're not capable, but you are. But Jesus says, when you're talking to God, don't ask the Lord to go and do the harvesting work for you.

No, ask him in your prayers to transform you into a worker, to transform his people into workers, to say, God, take the massive inability that we bring to you and turn it into ability.

And Jesus is saying, look, if you beg God with an urgent dependency not to let this great harvest be wasted, then he says, be ready to become the answer to your own prayers.

And that's what happens in verse one. Presumably the disciples go away and they pray and then in verse one, Jesus called his 12 disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

You prayed for more workers? Okay, I'm sending you as the workers. It's basic Christianity that Jesus is not going to let you remain as you are. And so don't be surprised that God makes you into a reaper because Jesus is saying here, he says, are you guys content to be disciples?

[28 : 46] Okay, well, I'm sending you out as apostles. Are you content just to be learners? Okay, I'm sending you out as missionaries. Are you content to be my passengers?

Okay, I want you to slide over and take my seat. I want you to drive. And they're like, what? You want us to go out all by ourselves? You want us to do what you've been doing?

And Jesus says, yeah, I do. And notice in these couple verses that list the apostles that Jesus is just sending people named Peter and Andrew and James and John, just ordinary, everyday people out, not as individuals, but as a little group, as a little team, a little community.

And he says, look, you don't necessarily need to overthink this. Just wherever you are and whatever you're doing and whomever you're with, say to the good shepherd, say to the Lord of the harvest, how are you at work here?

Because you were here before I got here. And you've already been at work and I'm just asking you to show, what do you want me to do? And when you get there, Jesus is saying, look, base your confidence, not in your gifts and your skills and your passions and your experience.

[30 : 08] Base your confidence in Jesus' heart of compassion for lost sheep. And in the fact that he wants to be their shepherd and their king. And in the fact that he's the one who's been raising up this harvest to bring it in to his barn.

Jesus gives us very specific tasks that we're to continue to do. He says in verse six, go to the lost sheep of Israel and as you go, proclaim this message.

The kingdom of heaven has come near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons freely you've received, freely give. Does that sound familiar?

That's exactly what Jesus was doing in verse 35. He says basically, look, you've heard me preach, you've seen me heal, now you go and do it. Go and show and tell who's really king.

Go spread the news about the king with your words and go display the power of the kingdom with your deeds. Go out and multiply among the people what I've already been doing, Jesus says.

[31 : 16] I've been proclaiming the kingdom and so will you. I've been rolling back the frontiers of sin and suffering and so will you. I've been confronting the powers of darkness and throwing evil spirits out of their human dwelling places and so must you.

I want my disciple community to be full of healers, full of restorers, full of people who bring life and hope to others, full of people who can show that God's new life is in fact breaking in to this sad old world and that in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit, God is in fact making all things new.

That's the mission. That's the Christian mission and the question is, might 2023 be harvest time in the East Bay?

And might this be the year of God's appointed time for the Holy Spirit to move in a way that he hasn't moved in a really long time? And might God grant that more and more people would be brought in, they'd be converted to obedient faith in Jesus Christ and none of us know the answer to that question except that we'll never know if we never ask.

And that's what Jesus says, ask me. Come and ask me. So friends, let's ask him in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[33 : 02] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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