

June 18, 2023  
Third Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 9:35 – 10:8 (Exodus 19:2-8; Romans 5:6-15)

JESUS HAS COMPASSION ON YOU.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our Gospel text this morning, St Matthew sums up Jesus' entire earthly ministry prior to His crucifixion, saying He went throughout all the cities and villages **teaching, preaching, and healing**. Jesus **teaches** His Word so that the people might come to faith in Him and abide in His Word, know the truth of His Word, and by the power of His Word, be set free from sin and the power of the devil. This teaching is the **proclamation** of the Good News of the kingdom of heaven. In His holy incarnation, God's Kingdom is now in the people's midst – and in our midst in His Word and Sacrament today. Jesus left His kingdom of Glory, put on the flesh of man, to bring His power and His gracious rule and reign to earth.

You and I might wonder why the Holy Spirit did not inspire Matthew to list Jesus' physical healings before His teaching and preaching. They seem really important. He performs miraculous healings of all sorts of diseases and afflictions: the lame walk, the dead are raised, the blind receive their sight, and demons are cast out. (cf: Matthew 9:1-31)

In our day, many people look at Jesus' teachings and miracles and draw the conclusion that the Christian Church's priority should be the social Gospel, which is: improving healthcare and battling inequality, poverty, crime, and racial tensions. And indeed, working toward social justice is good, right, and salutary for every Christian. God desires that we love our neighbor as ourselves – but – social justice is not the highest good. Social justice is not the reason our Lord of glory left heaven and was made man. You see, each and every person that Jesus feeds, heals, and raises from the dead only lives to die another day. All people die. And the only thing that matters at death is whether one has life-saving faith in Christ so that they will pass from death into eternal life. (cf: John 5:24)

In St John's Gospel, he refers to Jesus' miraculous healings as signs, (cf: John 2:11, 20:30) signs that point as proof of Jesus' divinity, that He is indeed the Son of God in flesh of man who came to seek and to save the lost. (cf: Luke 19:10) God's reign and rule has come to earth in the flesh of man and is overpowering the devil's afflictions of every sin and sickness, and most especially, granting spiritual healing and salvation to all who believe.

St Matthew records that:

***“When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*** (Matthew 9:36)

God's compassion goes way beyond the feeling of emotion. It is rooted in love. In the Old Testament, in spite of Israel's rebellions against God, He still had compassion on His people as well as on all His creation. (cf: 2 Kings 13:23; Psalm 145:9) Even though He would pour out His wrath on His defiant people, in His rich love, mercy, and compassion He would revive and restore them. (Deuteronomy 30:3; Psalm 135:14)

In the New Testament, God's own Son reflects the Father's compassion in His dealings with fallen humanity. Jesus loves and cares deeply for people with a compassion that is much different than human compassion. It is a gut-wrenching emotion that moves Him deep inside. He has heartfelt love and rich compassion that is part of the essence of His very being. He deeply cares about all of mankind's salvation.

Jesus tells us that He Himself is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. (cf: John 10:11) He sees His people in peril, being harassed by false shepherds who, instead of nurturing them and pointing them to Him, they direct them to works righteousness and away from Jesus love and righteousness. They blaspheme Jesus, declaring Him as the prince of demons. (cf: Matthew 9:3, 34) The people are harassed by a myriad of afflictions of body and soul, sent by the devil. Much worse than their physical condition is their spiritual condition. Just like you and me, good health is not mankind's highest priority or good. Your highest priority and good is your faith and confession in Christ. Like the crowds before Jesus, apart from faith and trust in Him, you and I and all mankind are in danger of eternal death and damnation, unable to save ourselves.

You know exactly what this harassment is like. Each and every day you are harassed by those who sin against you. You are harassed by the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh when you fall into sins both great and small. You are harassed by a sinful and dying body which reminds you every day that death will soon come for you. And – you are helpless to do anything about it. So you wander around like sheep without a shepherd, chasing after and serving the false gods of the world. You know your transgressions: what you have done, what you have left undone. When you examine yourself against the Ten Commandments you stand accused and condemned to death. You and I are a poor and miserable lot. To use the words of St Paul:

***“Wretched [people] that [we are] ... Who will deliver [us] from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*** (Romans 7:24–25)

In His great foreknowledge, our Lord God saw you harassed and helpless and had compassion on you. To be sure, the world looks upon you and watches how you deal with all the physical and emotional effects of living in this fallen world. They see your broken bodies and hear your emotional baggage that you pour out in conversation. They watch to see in whom you ultimately trust for healing and deliverance. But God alone can see into your sin-stained and darkened heart. God alone can heal and save you unto eternal life. God alone can – and He alone has done so.

***“... God shows his love for [you] in that while [you] were still [a] sinner..., Christ died for [you].”*** (Romans 5:8)

God always makes the first move. He saw the children of Israel harassed and helpless in the bondage of slavery in Egypt and bore them up on eagle's wings, bringing them to Himself at the

foot of Mt Sinai. (cf: Exodus 19:4) It was there that He made a covenant with them, setting them apart as a holy people. (cf: Exodus 19:5-6)

In the same way, our Lord God sees you harassed and helpless in the bondage of your sin and transgression and bears you up on the promises of Christ's work of salvation on your behalf. He sent His Son, Christ Jesus, to bear your griefs and carry your sorrows. (cf: Isaiah 53:4) St Peter writes:

***He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.***" (1 Peter 2:24-25)

God has spiritually healed and delivered you from sin, death, and the power of the devil in the waters of Holy Baptism, making a covenant with you, setting you apart as His holy child. In the washing of the water and Jesus' Word, you were cleansed and made righteous in the blood of the Lamb, declaring you not guilty of your sin. (cf: Romans 5:9; Revelation 7:14) So if He has declared you not guilty of your sin because of the shed blood of Jesus, how ***much more*** are you saved from God's wrath. How ***much more*** are you saved by Jesus' resurrection from the dead? (cf: Romans 4:25, 5:9-10) More than that! You can rejoice that for the sake of Jesus sacrificial life and death, you are reconciled back to the Father. (cf: Romans 5:11)

As God's enemy, dead in trespasses and sin, you could not love God – so He first loved you. He did not wait for you to get your act together. He did not wait until you checked off a long list of social justice activities or sacrificial offerings. No. He comes to you in divine compassion and pours out the abundance of His grace and the free gift of righteousness. (cf: Romans 5:17) You might not feel His compassion. Possibly you feel lost and abandoned. Dear Christian, those are the attacks and lies of the devil. Repent and remember your Baptism. Cling to God's promise made you in Baptismal waters. Jesus forgives you of all your sin. Daily drown your old Adam and die to sin and your evil desires. Arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

God has made a covenantal promise to you and has set you apart as His child. You are not to conform to this world but live in a way that is holy and acceptable to Him. (cf: Romans 12:1-2) Not because holy living earns you any merit before God but because it is God's holy will for your life.

***"...[He] has blessed [you] in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose [you] in him before the foundation of the world, that [you] should be holy and blameless before him."*** (Ephesians 1:3-4)

You are set apart and:

***"... are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that [you] should walk in them."*** (Ephesians 2:10)

By the grace of God you are saved by faith alone – but faith is never alone. Good works and deeds should flow forth from your faith.

As your neighbor watches how you, a confessing Christian, deals with the emotional and temporal effects of living in this fallen world, what do they see? Do they see someone who is

hopeless and helpless, or do they see someone who is borne up by the One who has compassion on you, borne up by the promises given you in Christ's life, death, and resurrection, granting you forgiveness, life, and salvation? When they are harassed by the effects of sin, are you there to bind up their wounds or do you leave them helpless? Do you point them to the false shepherds of the world or to the Good Shepherd who heals every disease and affliction and who can Shepherd them into eternal life?

Time is short. There is work to be done. The harvest is plentiful, and the workers are few. (cf: Matthew 9:37–38) All you have to do is look to your neighbors or turn on the news and you see many who are harassed and helpless – and are ripe for harvest in need of forgiveness and salvation through Christ Jesus. Pray that the Lord would send workers into the harvest. If you feel called into the Office of the Holy Ministry to be a worker, come see me. But just because God has not called you into the Office does not mean that you are not sent into the harvest. You are sent into the harvest every day in your vocation and station in life. You have been set apart as God's child to do the works that God has prepared for you to do and to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Our Lord God saw you harassed and helpless and had compassion on you. He showed His love for you that while you still a sinner, Christ died for you just as He died for your unbelieving neighbor. And that neighbor is ripe for the picking. But how can they come to the knowledge of the truth in Christ Jesus without someone going into the harvest field and tell them that they have a compassionate Savior who loves them and died for them? For all who cling to Christ's compassion and sacrifice on their behalf by faith, our Lord pours out an abundance of His grace, the gifts of His forgiveness, righteousness, and life everlasting.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.