

SERMON THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JUNE 14TH 2026

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers ...” based on Matthew 9: 35-10:1

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The Gospel reading before us today is familiar for those who have been attending church for years. And the title of the sermon today comes from one of the most well-known verses in this passage:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are ...”

We often hear these words as a call to evangelism, mission, or simply to an ordained full-time ministry. We think about many people who need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ as the “harvest” and the shortage of people willing to serve, or the workers. And there is certainly truth in that interpretation.

And Jesus’s statement about the harvest being plentiful but the workers being few (Matt. 9:37) speaks to a deep spiritual and communal reality. The needs are great, but there are not enough workers to meet the needs.

But, before Jesus speaks about the harvest and the workers, Matthew invites us to notice something deeper in his gospel. So, I would like us now to read the beginning of the passage.

First, Matthew tells us that Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news, and healing disease and sickness. Here, Jesus’s ministry is holistic. He is not only preaching but put his words into action. He sees their suffering, their lostness, and recognizes their need for leadership and care.

Then, we read these moving words: *“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matt. 9:36)*

As Jesus ministered among the people, crowds followed Him wherever He went. But when He looked upon them, He did not only see a large gathering of people. But He saw their pain. He saw their burdens. He saw their struggles. He saw people who were exhausted, beaten down, and

longing for hope. Matthew tells us that they were like sheep wandering without anyone to guide or protect them.

What makes this description so striking is that these people were not actually without leaders. Israel had priests, teachers of the Law, Pharisees, and other religious authorities. They were entrusted or ordained with the responsibility of shepherding God's people. They were called to guide, nurture, and care for the flock.

But in reality, the people are living under the weight of Roman occupation and in addition to that they were also oppressed under religious systems that too often failed to bring freedom, healing, and life. The very leaders who were meant to care for them had, in many ways, lost sight of the people they were called to serve.

Does this feel familiar to you?

If we look at our world today, we can see that many people still feel harassed and helpless. We live in a time when trust in leadership is declining because we see leaders who seem more concerned with power than with serving the common good. We also see corporate leaders who pursue profit while workers struggle to make ends meet. We see institutions that were meant to protect and support people sometimes failing those who depend on them.

Even church, at times, has fallen short of its calling, either because of their leaders or their teaching that causing pain instead of healing, causing exclusion instead of welcome, and judgment instead of grace. And that causing a lot of people losing their hope. And when people lost hope, oftentimes they got blamed for not being faithful and hopeful at all times.

But two thousand years ago, when Jesus started his ministries among His people—when Jesus looked at the crowds, He did not condemn them because they are losing their hope, but instead He responded with compassion.

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them...” (Matthew 9:36)

Matthew shows us here that Jesus does not look at people with distance or judgment, but with deep compassion. He sees their struggles, their weariness, and their need. And in response, He is moved with love.

So the question for us becomes unavoidable: do we see people around us the way Jesus sees them? Do we respond with compassion, or have we become quick to judge, slow to love, and hesitant to reach out?

As the passage continues, we move from Jesus' compassion to Jesus' calling. He says to His disciples:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

Friends, before Jesus gives His disciples authority in chapter 10, He first reshapes their understanding of calling. This calling is not about status, privilege, or being set above others. Rather, it is an invitation to participate in God's mission—to become labourers in God's harvest field, joining in the work that God is already doing in the world.

I find that image beautiful because it grounds us in what discipleship is truly about. A worker or labourer is not someone seeking recognition or praise. A labourer simply shows up each day, faithfully doing the work that has been entrusted to them. They care deeply about the field in which they serve and rejoice when the harvest comes in.

That is the image Jesus gives to His disciples.

Before they are apostles, they are labourers. Before they are leaders, they are servants. Before they are sent out, they must first understand that God's kingdom is built not through power and prestige but through humble and faithful service.

And I wonder if we need to hear that again today.

When we hear Jesus say, *"The labourers are few,"* many of us might immediately think of ministers, missionaries, elders, or church leaders. We assume that Jesus is speaking about a special group of people that called or ordained to serve God.

But if we look carefully at who first received these words, we can see the twelve disciples who were ordinary men. Fishermen. Tax collectors. Some of them are married, some are single. Some know a lot about the law, some are just learning. And most of them are people with no special qualifications or status.

And the same is true today.

The workers Jesus speaks of are not only those who wear robes, stand in pulpits, or hold leadership positions in the church. The labourers are all those who have responded to Christ's invitation to follow Him. The labourers are ordinary disciples who are willing to be used by God in ordinary and extraordinary ways. Which means all of us here and even those who are watching from home.

Perhaps your calling is not to preach or lead congregation. But, God called you to encourage someone who is discouraged. Perhaps God has called you to listen to neighbour who are lonely. Perhaps God has called you to care for a family member, pray faithfully for others, or simply be a visible witness to Christ's love in your daily life.

These acts may seem small, but in God's kingdom they matter deeply.

The harvest is plentiful because there are people all around us who are weary and burdened, people searching for meaning, hope, belonging, and grace. They may be found in our workplaces, our neighbourhoods, and even within our own families. Just as Jesus looked upon the crowds with compassion, He continues to look upon our world today with the same compassionate heart.

Friends, the harvest is plentiful. There is still work to be done. There are still people to be loved. There are still wounds to be healed. There are still stories of hope that need to be shared.

The question for us now no longer whether I'm included in the workers/laborers or not. But the question is whether we are willing to answer the call. Whether we are willing to offer our hands, hearts, time, and our gifts to the One who first had compassion on us.

For the good news of this passage is that Jesus also equips ordinary people to join Him in His work. And that means that the same Lord who calls us is also the Lord who will strengthen us, guide us, and work through us for the sake of His harvest. Remember, whenever Jesus calls, He also equips. His calling always comes with His enabling.

As Jesus sends out His disciples, He does not send them out empty-handed. He gives them authority and power to continue the work He has begun—to proclaim the good news, to bring healing, and to be signs of God's kingdom in the world. Their ministry would bear witness that they were truly representatives of Christ, carrying His message and His compassion to those in need.

As we leave the church later today, perhaps we can hear Jesus' words in a new way. The harvest is plentiful. There are plenty of people around us who are hurting, lonely, discouraged, and in need of hope. There are plenty of people who need compassion, kindness, and the love of Christ.

And the workers? The workers are not just pastors, missionaries, or church leaders. The workers are all of us who have chosen to follow Jesus. And yes, it is still only few of us comparing to many who hasn't heard about Him or accept Jesus in their hearts. We may not feel qualified. We may not always know what to say or do. But Jesus does not ask us to change the whole world by ourselves. He simply calls us to be faithful where we are—to show kindness to a neighbour, to encourage someone who is struggling, to pray for those in need, and to share Christ's love in the ordinary moments of life.

So may we go from this place with compassionate hearts, willing hands, and trust in the One who calls us. For the harvest is plentiful, and even though the workers are few, we will work together and God will amaze us by how meaningful and powerful it is if we all are together proclaiming the good news to those near and far from us.

Amen.