

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

Help (Desperately) Needed!

1. *The need*
2. *The answer*

Hymns: 440 – 548 – 542 – Closing: 578

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

³⁵ *Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.* ³⁶ *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* ³⁷ *Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.* ³⁸ *Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

^{10:1} *He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.*

² *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; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

⁵ *These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”*

Imagine for a moment that it’s early evening and your phone rings. You answer the phone, and one of your best friends in the world is on the other end of the line who lives nearby. They’re a bit worked up. They say, “I need some help. Can I ask you for a favor?” You answer, “Sure, what do you need?” They reply, “I have a bit of an emergency here at the house. I need a hand right away. Could you come over?”

If this is one of your best friends in the world calling, I’d imagine you wouldn’t think twice about that. I’d imagine you would say, “I’ll be right over. Can I bring anything that would be of help?”

I’d imagine it would be the same with other needs one of your well-loved, trusted friends might have. If they’d call and say, “I need to get to Bellevue right away. I’m late and my car just broke down,” I’d think you’d offer them yours pretty quickly. If they need \$25 in an urgent situation, I think you’d offer to help immediately.

What if Jesus called you up and said, “I need your help. I need it now.” I think all of us would immediately say, “Of course. How can I help? What can I do?” Today in our Gospel Reading from Matthew, Jesus does just that. He turns to his followers and says, “I need your help. Will you help?” **Jesus continues to speak to us – his followers today – with the same urgent need. Today let’s examine this truth more deeply. We will see:**

1. **The need**
2. **The answer**

1 — We read in Matthew 9, “*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.*” This account happened at a time when Jesus was very active in his ministry. He was in the north

part of the country and went on a ministry tour, preaching, teaching, and healing.

As he did this, he saw a great need: *“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.’”* The vividness of what Jesus observed can hardly be captured in the English translation. Many colorful words and concepts are used, which are listed in your Sermon Notes today:

- *“Harassed”* – The Greek word this comes from literally means “torn” and “cut.” It can mean that an animal has been literally skinned. For a live animal, a picture might be that it has been lost and wandering in the wilderness and has been scratched and torn by brambles and bushes.
- *“Helpless”* – Literally, this means “thrown,” even thrown to the ground. It means abused. As Jesus looks at the people, God’s flock, he sees neglected and mistreated sheep.
- *“Crowds” / “Great”* – Not only does Jesus see a pitiful condition when he looks at the people of God in his day, but he also sees many of them. Crowds are coming! There are so many that Jesus comments to his disciples that the harvest is great. What a need there is for faithful leaders and shepherds.
- *“Lost”* – Jesus later sends his apostles to the “lost sheep of Israel.” The primary meaning of this Greek word is “destroyed.” It even can mean to be lying dead. Jesus saw God’s people in a dire, dangerous state.

- *“Compassion”* – Therefore, we hear that Jesus had compassion on them. This might be the most vivid word of all. Literally, it means that your insides are moved. The kidneys and liver were thought of as the seat of emotion and will in Jesus’ day, so they would say that a person’s “organs were moved” when they had a deep feeling. Today we might say that a person’s “heart is stirred.”

Are there some of you out there that have had a cat or dog wander to your back door looking pretty rough? Perhaps it’s obvious they’ve been out in winter rains for a few days. They look skinny and malnourished. Maybe you’ve even been moved to feed the poor critter and let them into your garage or utility room.

To make this strike even closer to home, these are people. Have you ever seen such a commercial with children in need of food and care? Scenes of malnutrition and child neglect really move us, they stir our heart!

To apply these two words – harassed and helpless – to the Israelites at Jesus’ time, the people had been led by religious leaders that had made obedience to God’s laws the way to get right with him and be saved. You had to earn your way. They demanded that the people keep many additional, man-made laws, which weren’t given in the laws of Moses. Also, the mission for salvation had been changed from salvation from sin to salvation from the Romans. The Messiah was viewed as an individual who would deliver the nation from Roman rule. What an abuse of God’s teaching!

- “Ask” – So Jesus tells his disciples to “ask” God to do something about it. Literally, this word means to “beg.” It’s said by someone who has a great need for which they require assistance. This word might be used for your good friend at the beginning of the sermon who calls you up in need.
- “Send” – Literally, this word means to “throw.” Throw workers out there quickly, God! Shoot them like arrows! Throw them out there like emergency rations! Get the help out there quickly!

These words clearly describe the need that Jesus saw when he ministered to God’s people, and these words are very comforting to us today! How is this so? How does God view us? In our sins and wretchedness, what does Jesus see? He could well look at you and say, “Yuck! Get away from me! You are one wretched, nasty looking sheep. I want no part of you.” But when Jesus sees an individual who is lost in sin and who is poor, wretched, blind, and pitiful, when he sees what you are by nature, he’s moved. His heart is stirred. He was moved so deeply that he followed God’s plan to willingly serve as your Savior, to bleed and die on the cross so that your sins might be forgiven. He saved you when you were in a wretched state that left you helpless.

Also, what an encouragement this is for us. It’s an encouragement for us to view lost people like Jesus views them. How are people lost today?

- They’re lost in the teachings of humanism that have been pushed on them by the “scholars” of our day. Such scholars have said that “Man is the measure of all things” and that

God is a distant, uninterested force, if he exists at all.

- They’re lost in the temptations of the world. Many think that seeking money, wealth, pleasure, and comfort in this world are where it’s really at.
- They’re lost in despair and depression. Many who have seen that this world has no lasting pleasure, but only sin, pain, and sorrow in the end are lost in darkness and sadness that make them ask, “Why should I go on?”
- They’re lost in false teaching. Many religious shepherds have introduced their own teachings and concepts and departed from the truth of Scripture. Many view Scripture as an antiquated book that has lost its relevancy, and have sought “new truth” for today.

How do you view the lost around you in your neighborhood, at work, or on the news? There certainly are “crowds” of them! Might we be tempted to think differently than Jesus thought about lost people?

- Might we be tempted to simply be angry at them and their misguided thoughts and opinions and their wayward actions?
- Might we be tempted to say, “I’m too absorbed in my own life to notice the hurting masses around me?”
- Or “I don’t care.”

If so, may Jesus help us to see the need. The need is great in our world! And we need to be concerned about this, because Jesus now goes on to share with his disciples the answer and the cure for what he sees.

2 — Jesus gave some direction to the apostles. Jesus told them, “*Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*” First, they were to pray earnestly and beg the Lord for workers to go into the fields. The tense of this verb in Greek implies that this action is to begin. In other words, they hadn’t been praying about this but they were supposed to start!

Then we read, “*He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness... 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, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*” Isn’t this an interesting situation? Jesus told the disciples to start praying to the Lord to provide workers to go to these hurting people, and then Jesus filled them in that they were the first answer to their own prayer! They themselves were to go – and go immediately.

Jesus gave them a specific audience to go to. They were to go to the Jewish towns only. The time had not come for Jesus to commission his disciples to go to the world. That would come later. Starting among their own countrymen would be a good start. And they would have a common ground and language on which to begin.

Jesus also gave them their message. Their sermon theme in proclaiming God’s message was “*The kingdom of heaven is near.*” This sermon theme would serve as both a warning of law and a comfort of the gospel for their hearers. For those on a sinful path, this warning would be fitting. God was acting in the world through the Savior who had come. They had better change their ways and prepare their hearts!

It would also serve as a comforting gospel message to the faithful. God was acting to deliver his people. He had not gone back on his promises, but would be faithful in saving them and preserving them in the faith.

Jesus also gave them signs. Since the Scriptures had not been completed and these missionaries would be going “cold” to people on their mission trip, Jesus gave them the signs that accompanied his own ministry. These signs authenticated their message and ministry. These signs also showed true compassion for those that they would preach to.

And off they went!

In the answer that Jesus gave the apostles in his day, we see the answer to the great need in our day as well. You are the answer to the great need that we have described. Jesus sends you and public workers out to answer the call to gather the harvest. How can this happen?

1. **It happens when we pray.** It happens when we beg the Lord of the harvest for workers for his harvest field. After hearing that, you may be tempted to say, “Of course. Prayer is good. Let’s move on to more concrete solutions.” But don’t gloss over that first answer too quickly. Might Jesus’ words to the apostles – “Start praying about this” – apply to you as well? Have you not been praying for those in your neighborhoods who do not go to God’s house on Sundays and whose life is lost in sin? Do you neglect to pray for the misled and sinning that you see on the news? Do you neglect to pray for ungodly leaders in our world? Start praying to the Lord of the harvest about this! After all, it

is his harvest and he sends the workers out.

2. **It happens in your personal life and witness.** How will they hear? How does Jesus tell us our prayers for their enlightenment will be answered? He sends you through your Christian life to show them what Jesus is about. He sends you through your words of faith to tell them of sin and redemption. He sends you!
3. **It happens when you support your church and your synod.** I was reminded this week of what a great blessing it has been to our church to have two pastors ministering to and leading our congregation. Our two paths this week were quite different. Some of the things on my “to do list” had to do with nourishing our own flock. I prepared the service and sermon for the week. I prepared the Bible Class for Sunday morning. I visited our shut-ins that are not able to come to church anymore, due to age and health. I coordinated the concert that was here on Thursday evening for our edification and enjoyment. Pastor Voss’ week was totally different. I know that two of the major items on his list were organization and training for Vacation Bible School, which starts tomorrow. (If any of you have ever helped with VBS, you know how this can consume you!) He also was preparing for our door-to-door flier drop today for soccer camp later this month, and is planning for details with that.

My point is this. We are equipped to do more outreach efforts as a

congregation than ever: VBS, Soccer Camp, our grade school contacts, planning edifying worship for friends, concerts, advertising, and even plans for streaming our worship services live from the back. But your pastors cannot do all of this, just as Jesus saw he needed to commission helpers in his ministry. **What role will you have?** What do you do to support our outreach events and efforts in any of these or other events? Your pastors are here to lead and train as we all strive to harvest the fields around us!

4. **Finally, it happens when we encourage more young people to consider being a public minister.** It happens when you recruit future public workers from among our young people in our church and synod. Young people, have you thought about that lately? What do you want to do with your life? Could God use you to answer the call publicly to serve him in a pulpit and by leading a congregation in spreading his Word? Could God use you in a classroom in one of our synod schools to teach children or young adults about God’s law and gospel? Consider it this morning and in days to come, and ask “Why not?” Why not consider being a public minister in the harvest field?

As far as pastors are concerned, I looked at the numbers of men currently studying to become pastors in our synod. In recent years we’ve heard on Call Day that some men have not been assigned, due to the limited number of Calls available. It seems those days are coming to an end. This year 44 men were

available to be assigned. In the vicar class, 37 men were available. The numbers will continue to change. The first year class at the seminary, which will have some natural attrition, stands at 28. And the freshman class at college at MLC this past year was 24. Young men, will you serve?

For those of you already with occupations, what an encouragement this is to plant the seeds in our young people to think about attending MLC and serving as a teacher or pastor in our circles. The harvest certainly will continue to be great and they are the future leaders among us!

As we close our look at Jesus' commission to his apostles today, consider the accomplishments that God brought about through their work and through the early Church. It may have seemed like quite a small beginning at Jesus' time and after he ascended into heaven, but look at the harvest that God has brought about since that time. What remarkable things he has done as countless souls have streamed into his Church!

May we pray that God would continue to enlighten those who are lost in sin. May we also recognize that Jesus calls to us today to serve in this effort. May we work for his kingdom in whatever station of life he has put us. For the harvest continues to be great! Amen.