

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday after Trinity, July 5, 2009

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Hymns: 485, 283, 488, 496, 489.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 6: 1-9, Ephesians 4:7-16, Luke 9: 57-10:2.

Text: Matthew 9:37-38.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus lived in a world with no shortage of spiritual advisors. The nation of Israel, God's chosen people to whom the Messiah was sent, was a very "religious" nation. Almost every community had its synagogue. There was no shortage of rabbis and teachers of the law. There were very many religious people supposedly practicing their religion, for we read in Scripture about the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes, also called the teachers of the law. Doesn't it kind of sound like our communities? There is no shortage of places that claim to teach something about religion or a supreme being. But how many spiritual advisors – preachers, churches, religious leaders and anyone who claims to be "spiritual" – are pointing people in the right direction? Jesus himself plainly tells us in John 14:6 *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* We MUST approach God – the true God – only through Jesus Christ.

The verses immediately before our sermon text, from last week's gospel lesson, tell us that Jesus had compassion on the people, who *"were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* Jesus was just one person, but he continued to travel from town to town preaching, teaching, and healing, and the crowds continued to follow him. He accurately saw the people as shepherdless sheep who were on their way to hell, and he was determined to rescue as many of them as possible. He also saw them as a field of grain ready for the harvest. After grain has reached that point, it must be harvested; otherwise it will fall to the ground and go to waste and be destroyed.

Then comes this command to his disciples giving the command to ask God to send out workers into his harvest field.

"ASK THE LORD OF THE HARVEST ... TO SEND OUT WORKERS INTO HIS HARVEST FIELD"

- 1. The harvest field is the Lord's but we are to work in it!**
- 2. ASK the Lord for workers; earnestly pray for workers!**

We don't have to know much about what is going on in the world to realize that there are many souls to harvest for the Lord, the true God. There are many unbelievers surrounding us, but we may be unable or reluctant to recognize that they are in need of eternal salvation. In addition, the population of the world is growing. Jesus is talking about a labor shortage. Very few, it seems, want to follow Jesus, and far fewer want to be workers in the Lord's harvest field to help gather in souls. Jesus asked his disciples, and he also asks us, to share in his compassion, and then he tells us the first thing he wants us to do to show such compassion. *"Ask the Lord of the harvest ... to send out workers into his harvest field."*

It is the Lord's harvest field, and he will see to it that the necessary workers bring the harvest in. He assures us that none of his elect will perish. All his sheep will be gathered into his fold. He will accomplish that either with us or without us. That does not depend on us. But that doesn't take anything away from the command in our sermon text to ask for workers for his harvest field. God is capable of doing anything he wishes but he gives

to his followers – to us – the familiar command, called “the great commission” to ***“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*** Matthew 28:19-20. We are to go out and teach all nations. And even if we can’t personally teach all nations, we can teach those we have personal contact with and send others to make disciples of those we can’t personally reach.

This is an urgent command. The words in our sermon text were spoken fairly early in Jesus’ three-year public ministry. The great commission was spoken shortly before he ascended into heaven. We can see the urgency in Jesus’ command for his followers to proclaim the Gospel in this passage from Mark 16:15-16: ***“He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*** Those words of Jesus make it clear that this is a life and death matter – eternal life or eternal death.

The harvest, the crop to be harvested is truly plentiful, Jesus tells us. Didn’t he tell his first disciples he would make them “fishers of men”? They were accustomed to fishing with nets, to gather in as many as possible. It wasn’t like our fishing, which commonly is happy to bring in one fish at a time because we have one line in the water. Jesus had compassion ***“on the crowds”***. Many were following him because they could be healed of physical diseases. But remember that Jesus’ first calling was to heal the entire world of the disease of sin. That’s the first thing he came for. His miracles just proved that he was the Son of God who came to heal sin-sick souls.

“But the workers are few”, Jesus says. There aren’t enough laborers to bring in the harvest; there is a shortage of workers. So Jesus commands his followers – and us -- ***“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field,”*** It is the Lord’s harvest field. He owns it, he controls the field. The Lord doesn’t need us, but he wants to use us. He graciously wants to give us the privilege of being involved in this all-important work, work with blessed results that will last into eternity. And the first thing he asks us to do is exceedingly simple and will cost nothing but some of our time and a great deal of dedication. He tells us to pray for workers for his harvest field. In response to our prayers he will provide those workers. As we sincerely offer such prayers to our heavenly Father, we surely should be willing to be workers ourselves. It is a high privilege not only to pray for this work and support it, but also to be personally involved in doing it. But Satan wants us to regard it as a grievous burden that we ought to avoid.

No one person can do this work all alone. Jesus knew he couldn’t possibly preach the gospel to the entire nation of Israel by himself. He sent his 12 apostles out, and then later he sent out 72 men to preach the gospel. And before he ascended into heaven, he commanded ALL his followers to preach the gospel! We too should be thinking about how we can all be involved in this work of gathering in the harvest of souls. Along with the rest of us, your pastor is also growing older. Have you thought about what this congregation will do when your pastor is no longer able to preach and serve you?

We hope that you are praying earnestly for workers in the church. St. Paul expressed his concern to the elders of the church at Ephesus for the time when he would no longer be around: ***“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.”*** Acts 20:29. That kind of warning should make us want to pray all the more seriously and frequently for more workers in the church. When in our sermon text Jesus says “Ask” the Lord, it means to pray, to beg of the Lord, to beseech him. The KJV uses the stronger translation: ***“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.”*** Matthew 9:38 (KJV). And what happens when we ask of the Lord? Jesus said ***“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*** Matthew 7:7-8. Remember what God wrote in

James 5:16: ***“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*** The KJV there emphasizes the kind of prayer: ***“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”***

The best and greatest thing we can do for more pastors is to pray. Beseech, beg, pray to the Lord for workers for the harvest. While we leave all things to God’s direction, there are other things we can do to prepare ourselves for the work of the Lord. And it is an important work, an essential work, and no one person can do it all. St. Paul tells us that different laborers do different jobs, but God has to give the blessing. In 1 Corinthians 3:6 he says, ***“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”***

Humanly speaking, we know that there are other things we can do. We are to continue searching the scriptures. Then we will know the truth and it is the truth of God’s Word that sets mankind free from sin. When we know the truth, we will be able to discern and avoid error and false teachers.

Are you encouraging children and our young people to study for service in the Lord’s harvest field? Not only the children of others but your own children? Are you building a good Christian library for yourselves? For many years the LCCF has been publishing weekly sermons. They are a very valuable resource, especially for those times when you are not sitting in church on Sunday mornings, such as your vacation Sundays. Are you creating a hunger for God’s Word and feeding that hunger in your families? The LCCF has reprinted a pamphlet about family devotion called “The Use of God’s Word in the Home”. (Copies are available.)

Christian parents are responsible for the Christian education of their children. We let the state in public schools educate our children starting with age 5 and sometimes earlier, but we are responsible for the Christian educating of our children. We have Catechism Instruction. But that is only about 180 hours spread out over a few years of our children’s life. That is just over one work-month of 8 hour days to prepare for a lifetime! Compare that with the number of hours your children spend in doing other things! Parents MUST help their children. And there will be a side benefit: You will be reminded again of what you yourself learned in Catechism instruction. And if you make it a part of your family worship time to review what the catechism-age children are learning, the others in the family will also be learning. The younger ones do hear and learn. The older ones need the review. Surely you too have pleasant memories of learning God’s Word, and you will create similar memories when you involve your whole family in reviewing the Catechism Instruction assignment with the whole family.

How else can members help? Our congregations can use assistance with teaching our children, such as Sunday School teachers. Even adult males can teach Sunday School! And we need to pray for ministers of music, that more of our people will want to serve the Lord in that way in our congregations and worship gatherings. And what about all the external things associated with a church? We need to continue with maintenance of the building and property and keeping our facilities clean and neat so that visitors – or WE – will not be ashamed or embarrassed about a small church that isn’t physically inviting.

You may have just the gift of God that is needed. The Lord gives gifts as you heard in our Epistle lesson: ***“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”*** Ephesians 4:7-12a.

The Lord doesn’t need us, but he wants to use us. He graciously wants to give us the privilege of being involved in his all-important work, work with blessed results that will last into eternity. ***“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*** Amen.