

“Reaching Out to the Lost with Christ’s Compassion”

(Matthew 9:35-10:8 – Pentecost 4 – June 21, 2026)

Matthew 9:35-10:8 – ³⁵*Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.* ³⁶*But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.* ³⁷*Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.* ³⁸*Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”* ¹*And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.* ²*Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.* ⁵*These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans.* ⁶*But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* ⁷*And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’* ⁸*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”*

Dear Redeemed in Jesus Christ:

When a person is lost, people go into action to find them. When someone is lost at sea, the Coast Guard immediately sends out ships and aircraft to search until the lost is found. When a child has wandered off or is feared to have been kidnapped, an all-points bulletin is posted and police mount searches. People care deeply for the lost and want to reach out and help.

God also cares deeply for the lost. But here we speak not only of the physically lost, but especially the spiritually lost. God sent His Son into the world on a search and rescue mission, to seek and to save sinners (Luke 19:10). Here, we see Jesus filled with compassion for lost souls, reaching out to minister to them. He sends His disciples on a search and rescue mission, to share His compassion for the lost, to share His Gospel by which souls are found and saved.

In light of our text, let us consider our place in the great mission of **“Reaching Out to the Lost with Christ’s Compassion.”** It includes **1) Seeing their need, 2) Praying for them, and 3) Bringing the Gospel to them.**

1) Seeing their need

As Jesus went through the cities and villages ministering to the people, He saw their need. The obvious needs were the sicknesses of many. How pitiful it was to see those who lived, day after day, with debilitating diseases for which there was no cure. Jesus had compassion on them and reached out to cure them with His divine power.

But what concerned Jesus most were their spiritual needs. For it says: *“He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd”* (vs. 36). Israel’s religious leaders were supposed to be shepherding the people by God’s Word, but they taught the teachings and traditions of men. They loaded people down with many legalistic demands as the way to get right with God. At the same time, the false shepherds did not preach the Gospel that comforts hearts of sinners. The people did not hear God’s good news of forgiveness and eternal life in the name of Christ, freely given to all who believe.

Jesus was *“moved with compassion”* as He saw the people’s spiritual condition. They were *“weary”* – weak, losing hope, despairing under the heavy burden of the law. They were *“scattered”* – cast off, abandoned – *“like sheep having no shepherd.”* Left to their own wandering, they were in a defenseless and dangerous spiritual condition, victims of wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15).

Jesus reached out to the lost with compassion, seeing their need and addressing it. He healed and provided for their physical needs, yes. But most importantly, He went about *“teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom”* (vs. 35). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, wanted all to know that He would lay down His life to take away their sins. He wanted all who were weary and burdened by sin to know He had come to fulfill all righteousness for them. He wanted to bring them God’s forgiveness and healing – not only for this life, but for eternal life.

This was Jesus’ heart of compassion when He came to seek and save us from our lost condition. Today’s Epistle brings this: *“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”* (Romans 5:5, 8-10). When we were lost in sin and unbelief, without any strength to save ourselves, God sent His Son to the cross to pay with His life for our sins, to save us from death and judgment. When we were enemies of God, He sent His Son to befriend us and reconcile us to Himself by His blood-bought peace and forgiveness. Through the death and resurrection of His Son, God has saved us for eternal life.

Once we were like lost sheep, going astray in our own sinful ways (Isaiah 53:6); but the Good Shepherd sought and found us, calling us to Himself in repentance and faith. He baptized and washed us of all sin, presenting us holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:26-27). He has taken us into His care. So we rejoice and say with today’s Psalm: *“It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture”* (Psalm 100:3).

After the heart of Jesus, may we be filled with compassion for the lost, as we see their need. Many around us are like lost sheep. They are scattered among false religions and philosophies of the world. They wander about, seeking a path to heaven in their own sin-corrupted works.

They seek life in the short-lived pleasures and treasures of this world. They do not realize that they are being led by the lies of the wolf, the devil, in a path of spiritual and eternal death.

Reaching out to the lost with Christ's compassion means we see their true need. As individuals, there are many ways we serve the daily needs of people in our God-given callings. As a church, we may have opportunity to assist people with physical needs. It is an important part of loving our neighbor. But like Jesus, we love our neighbor in body *and* soul. We want to share with fellow sinners the good news that God sent His Son to win our forgiveness and salvation, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

2) Praying for them

Second, reaching out to the lost with Christ's compassion includes praying for them.

Sometimes, the thought of sharing our faith with a certain person may seem overwhelming. It may be difficult to share the Gospel with them. They may not feel lost at all; they may feel fine as they are and want to hear no more. If ministering to the spiritual needs of one person may seem overwhelming at times, how about ministering to a world of souls lost in impenitence and unbelief? What can so few do – what can you and I do? We can pray!

Jesus addresses these concerns as He says: *"The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest"* (vs. 37).

Jesus reminds us, first, that it is the Lord's harvest. The world is the field, and God wants all people to be part of His gracious harvest, knowing Jesus as their Savior (1 Timothy 2:4). But we are not the ones who will change hearts and bring people into His Kingdom by faith. It is the Holy Spirit who does that through the power of the Gospel (Romans 1:16).

As the Lord of the harvest, it is He who sends laborers into the harvest field with His Gospel, that many may hear and believe and be saved. He calls pastors, teachers, and missionaries in every land (Ephesians 4:10) to preach His Word and administer His Sacraments, by which people are brought to faith and continue to be strengthened in faith. So we pray the Lord of the harvest to send workers into the field to share His saving Gospel where needed.

As we pray that His Gospel be brought to souls who are still lost, we recognize our own part as His witnesses. The Bible teaches that, as believers, we are part of His holy priesthood. We can pray for others and proclaim Jesus' message of salvation to them (1 Peter 2:5, 9). We can pray for that certain person who does not know Jesus. We can pray for our outreach to the lost in our neighborhood. We can pray for nations. In answer to our prayer to the Lord of the harvest, it may be you or me that He chooses to bring the Gospel to that unbelieving family member, that friend, that coworker, that neighbor. It may be you or me that He enables to support those who preach the Gospel in our behalf, in our mission at home or in missions around the world.

3) Bringing the Gospel to them

Finally then, reaching out to the lost with Christ's compassion is centered in bringing His saving Gospel to them.

Here, Jesus sent the disciples on a search and rescue mission to the lost sheep of Israel, with these instructions: *"As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give"* (vs. 7-8). As those disciples preached Christ's Gospel, it was accompanied with proof of His saving power. In Jesus' name, lost souls were rescued from Satan's evil power and brought into Christ's gracious Kingdom. In Jesus' name, sin-sick souls were healed through His forgiveness and restored for eternal life.

In our search and rescue mission to the lost, the Gospel is the power of God to save sinners. As we share the truth of His Word, it casts out Satan's falsehood and sets sinners free in Christ. It works repentance and faith in the heart, bringing eternal life and healing.

We can bring His Gospel to those who are weary and burdened under a load of guilt, feeling condemnation of the Law. We can say: "Christ has taken your sin away from you. He suffered and died on the cross in your place. In Jesus' name, you are set free from all condemnation."

We can bring the Gospel to those who are weary and sick, feeling life fading away. We can say: "In taking your sin, Christ has taken away the root of sickness and death. In Jesus' name, you are healed for eternal life, already in your soul, and one day in a perfect heavenly body."

We can bring the Gospel to those who are scattered, feeling cast off and abandoned. We can say: "The Good Shepherd who gave His life for you will never leave you. He calls you by name, you are His. He has compassion for you. He hears your prayer and cares for you."

When a person is lost, it moves the heart. People go into action to search and rescue them. Our Savior is moved with compassion for the lost. He came from heaven to give His life for all, that none may be lost. He sends His Gospel to the ends of the earth, that all may be brought to saving faith. When a missing person is found and rescued, there is great joy. How much more when even one sinner is brought to faith and salvation; all of heaven rejoices! (Luke 15:7)

Now the Good Shepherd has sought and found us. He has rescued and brought us home in His care. As His people, the sheep of His pasture, may His compassion for us move us reach to out to the lost – seeing their need, praying for them, and bringing His saving Gospel to them.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.