“The Heart of the Harvest” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 3
June 14, 2026

I. **Matthew 9:36-38** – [36]When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for 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 laborers are few; [38]therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

II. **The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few**.

a. As we read this verse, it reminds me of Wyatt as he traveled last week to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.
   i. He came to our church as a young kid with his parents, and we’ve watched him grow into someone who now wants to go through pastoral formation.
   ii. In fact, the seminary uses these Bible verses from Matthew 9 as a reminder to pray for more workers to go into the harvest field.
   iii. So, Wyatt is now at the seminary, with several years of intense work ahead… and the hope is that he completes everything and becomes a pastor…
   iv. Yet, does that mean we’ve done our job at Ascension – to find the laborers who are to become professional church workers?
      1. We’ve had a few professional church workers from our congregation in my time here – DCE’s (Directors of Christian Education) in Jeremiah Drelleshak, a Deaconess as Hana will complete her program soon, my son-in-law Andy Berg who is now a pastor, and there are probably others who became Lutheran teachers or musicians.
      2. The issue at hand here is whether Jesus is talking about people who are trained up and sent out, or just people who are Christians… like you.

b. Sometimes we aggrandize or exalt the pastors and others who are formally trained to serve in ministry… and certainly they were called to a different vocation for the Lord, but it is no more special than you and the vocations you have.
   i. It’s not wrong to respect the Office of the Public Ministry – because the office is important… but I am a person just like everyone else… and I’m not more capable than anyone else of working in the harvest field.
   ii. Again, the Lord of the harvest is seeking laborers – not professional church workers necessarily – but <u>all Christians</u> to step up and bring the Good News to others.

iii. Now, that might make you feel uncomfortable – kind of like last week's message about the call of Matthew as he may have wondered, "Who, me?"
    1. You might think you are unqualified or inadequate to be a laborer for the Lord, or maybe you need to study the Bible more.
    2. Or you might feel guilty that you don't spend more time sharing Jesus with others… and that you should be more willing.
iv. Whatever challenges you about being a laborer in the harvest, just recognize that you are competent and qualified because you have faith in Jesus Christ.
v. God tells us in Exodus 19:6, "…and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."
    1. In other words, as we have faith in Jesus, we are part of the priesthood… or what we call the priesthood of all believers.
    2. Again, even though God has placed some in the office of pastor, we are all part of the priesthood working as laborers in the harvest field.

III. **As we consider how many people don't know Jesus** around us, fear or self-doubt should not be our guide.

a. In fact, Jesus looked out on the crowds, and He was moved with compassion for them.
    i. As I was studying more about this word, it doesn't translate quite the same in English.
    ii. Pastor Phil Brandt used the idea of gut wrenching as a closer English translation, but even more, "The emotional freight of this word is such that Jesus was made physically sick by what He saw, not revolted, but the pain and suffering of the people almost overwhelmed Him humanly speaking."
    iii. When Jesus looked upon the people and saw the brokenness, the loss, the wandering without God… His heart was deeply moved for them… because Jesus <u>loves all</u> people.
b. Consider the depth of Jesus' love as the reason He wants us to share Him and witness about Him to others.
    i. He isn't trying to guilt trip us or make us feel insecure and incompetent… He simply loves people with such depth that He wants all of us to share the Good News that would bring them salvation too.
    ii. At the very heart of the harvest is the love of Jesus Christ.
c. When you think about it, Jesus could just as easily be looking out over the people in this church and have the same feeling – not because we don't know Him – but because we are suffering in a broken creation and spiritual darkness that is all around us.

i. We can be just as harassed and helpless as the crowds Jesus saw, but we have something that makes an eternal difference in our lives – and a hope that goes beyond the brokenness of this world.
ii. We have faith in Jesus Christ… so when evil breaks out against us, when diseases cause us to struggle, when we are afflicted in every way… the Living God has sent us Jesus – the one who redeems and restores all things.
iii. Jesus knows that things are not the way they are supposed to be, especially in men and women who were created in God's image.
1. The problem is that we can relate more to the crowd in this Gospel lesson than a laborer being sent into the harvest.

d. However, I want to encourage you with the same heart of the harvest… the love of Jesus Christ for all people.

IV. **Our Savior Jesus bore our suffering to bring us peace**.

a. As it says in Isaiah 53 – "[4] Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. [5] But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:4-5)
b. Yes, the very suffering that overwhelmed Him as He looked over the crowds… was now laid upon Him beyond any comparison.
c. This is why we know Jesus loves us: He took the pain and suffering that belonged to us upon Himself so that it would not capture us for an eternity.
i. While we were still sinners and enemies of God, He showed how much He loves us… He died for us. (Romans 5:8)
ii. The reality is that Jesus is the God of all Creation – who intends to redeem and restore all things – especially humanity!
iii. Through His great sacrifice in suffering beyond measure and dying on the cross, He bought us back… He rescued us.

V. **You are rescued and forgiven… and a laborer for Christ.**

a. Again, you may not feel like you have the gifts or ability… you may have your own troubles and afflictions you are dealing with… but that is even more of a reason to labor in the harvest with the love of Christ.
i. Knowing that our suffering is not permanent, and the comfort we get from having Jesus in our lives is like a light shining out in darkness.
ii. People want to know how we have peace through it all, how we have hope through it all… and… we can respond… Jesus.
b. I know you've heard this many times, but each of you have a unique set of gifts, circumstances, relationships, and responsibilities or vocations.
i. In these various places, where can you simply invite a friend?
1. At the end of August, we will have a Friendship Sunday… and maybe someone you know could join you that day.

ii. As you spend time on walks, out in the yard doing work, going to doctor's offices and waiting rooms, standing in line, and many other places, we can strike up a brief conversation that might have eternal results.
iii. It's not so much you and your ability… it's the heart of the harvest – Jesus and His inconceivable love.

c. So remember, the harvest is still plentiful, and by His grace we join the priesthood of believers in laboring with the love of Jesus. Amen.