

Pastor Bill Sass - Sermon for June 14, 2020

Where are the Laborers?

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Carl A. Boyle, a sales representative, was driving home when he saw a group of young children selling Kool-Aid on a corner in his neighborhood. They had posted the typical hand-scrawled sign over their stand: "Kool-Aid, 10 cents." Carl was intrigued. He pulled over to the curb. A young man approached and asked if he would like strawberry or grape Kool-Aid. Carl placed his order and handed the boy a quarter. After much deliberation, the children determined he had some change coming, and rifled through the cigar box until they finally came up with the correct amount. The boy returned with the change, then stood by the side of the car. He asked if Carl was finished drinking. "just about," said Carl. "Why?" "That's the only cup we have," answered the boy, "and we need it to stay in business."

It's difficult to operate a Kool-Aid business if you only have one cup. We sometimes make that mistake in the church.

Today we are focusing our attention on the evangelistic task of the church. For many, the word "evangelism" brings to mind one or two prominent "cups" – the televangelist or the tent revival. In some churches, it means a once-a-year special event, or strategy for incorporating newcomers into the life of the church. By limiting our vision to one or two of these cups, we may be stifling Christ's work on earth, and cheating ourselves of the most rewarding endeavors Christ offers us.

LET'S BEGIN BY ANCHORING OUR CONCERN IN CHRIST'S COMPASSION FOR THE WORLD. The compassion is the reason He sends us out to make new disciples. We read in Matthew 9:36 "When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Can you think of a better description of people today – "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd?"

It is a marvelous metaphor – or more properly, a striking simile. Can you see a flick of sheep milling around in a pen? Frightened and confused, they stumble blindly, bumping into one another, because they don't know which way to turn. How like so many of us.

There is a famous study involving graduates of Yale University of the class of 1953. It involves goal-setting. Do you know where you are headed in life? Do you know how to get there?

The graduates involved in these studies were asked if they had a clear, specific set of goals for their future. Were these goals written down with a plan for achieving them? It turned out only 3 percent of those interviewed had such written goals.

Twenty years later, in 1973, the researchers went back and interviewed the surviving members of the 1953 graduating class. They discovered the 3 percent with written, specific goals had achieved more in financial than the other 97 percent put together. they also seemed to be happier, and more "together" in every way.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. they had no idea where they were headed, or how they would get there. Even worse, they had attached themselves to false gods.

Many people link themselves to false gods – power, wealth, physical appearance, the approval of their peers, etc. Sooner or later, each of these gods betrays us. They can take us only so far, and no farther. Only one is sufficient in every circumstance in life and beyond. It is the eternal God – the God who made Himself known in Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds. He, alone, understood the real tragedy of a life of empty values, with no direction, a life linked to false gods. He “had compassion for them,” Matthew tells us, “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. THEN he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

Can you see motivation for what we call evangelism is Christ’s compassion for the world? We are not a business enterprise. Our motive is not a more impressive bottom line. Our aim is not to be the biggest and best. There are people outside this church who are confused, angry, hurting, and dying. There are families that are disintegrating, young minds being destroyed by drugs, and old folks feeling forgotten. The need is almost overwhelming. Truly, the harvest is plentiful.

The question then, is, where are the laborers? Where are those committed to being the body of Christ in ministry to the world? Where are those who will point their family, their friends, and associates to the One who can satisfy their needs in all circumstances, for now and eternity? I’m not talking about an offensive holier-than-thou salesmanship. I’m talking about caring enough that you help them out of their confusion, loneliness, and fear. Let me give you an example.

Catherine Marshall told about a couple named Mary and Harold Brinig. Mary and Harold moved to Chicago many years ago. They had no friends in Chicago. Soon, they were lonely. They were also irritable, and unhappy with each other.

While seeking help from the Bible, they saw these words of Jesus: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that fruit should abide.” (John 15:16) Somehow that passage became like a light penetrating their darkness. They realized much of their unhappiness was caused by self-centeredness. They wondered if Jesus was choosing them for some kind of service. They also wondered what type of service they could possibly perform in such a big city as Chicago.

The first person they encountered after this discovery was the waitress who served them in a nearby restaurant. She apologized for giving them such slow service, and said she was new in the city, and miserable. They invited her to visit them in their apartment after work.

A neighbor who was a widower became the second person they befriended. Soon, a dozen people were meeting once a week for conversation and prayer.

Out of these meetings grew a project called “Adventures in Friendship.” Soon scores of people were involved in visiting the lonely and shut-ins throughout the whole area.

There was an interesting by-product of this ministry. Mary and Harold became so absorbed in the needs of others that they soon forgot their own troubles. Their lives became immeasurably richer and fuller.

Probably, Mary and Harold would never have thought they were doing evangelism. It didn’t fit the cup they pictured when they thought of that word. They were simply showing compassion to people in need – in Jesus’ name. And that is what the church of Jesus Christ is all about.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds. Harassed and helpless, they were like sheep without a shepherd. And there were so many of them. Just like today. "The harvest is plentiful; but the laborers are few." Where are the laborers? Where are those who care enough to become involved in the lives of others? Where are those willing to take time to show love to young people and old folks, to the substance abuser, and victims of broken families, to the down-and-out as well as the up-and-in? Where are the laborers? Christ asks even today. Can he count on you? AMEN!