

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Pentecost 4; June 28, 2020

The story is told about a man who was walking along the ocean early one morning after a terrible storm had come through the night before. He was curious to see what treasure that might have been washed ashore from the storm. As he began to walk along, he saw the beach covered with something ahead of him. As he got closer, he realized that the beach was covered completely with starfish. It wasn't just in a small area. The beach was covered with starfish as far as he could see. As he walked along, he realized that they weren't going anywhere. They weren't going back into the water by themselves. If they were left out on the beach, they would either be eaten by the birds that were beginning to eat them or they would be baked by the hot sun. So as he began to walk along, he would pick one up after another and began to toss them back into the ocean. But there were so many, that he didn't seem to be much progress as well.

As he walked along tossing one after another into the water, he had a voice yell down to him from one of the balconies of a hotel along the beach. The man yelled down: *"Are you out of your mind? Maybe you can't see what I can see from here, but there are starfish washed ashore as far as I can see. This beach goes on for miles. You are never going to be able to save all of them. You are really not going to make that big of a difference."* The man looked down at those starfish and picked up another and tossed it back into the ocean. Then he turned to the man on the balcony and said: *"Well, you might be right. But it makes a difference for that one."*

God looked down at a world of people who were in big trouble. There wasn't a thing that they could do about it. But it wasn't always that way. He created a perfect man and a perfect woman and placed them in a perfect world. It didn't take long for them to mess everything up. It would have been easy for God to just simply start over. It would have been easy for God to throw in the towel on this man and woman he made. Yet, the Bible tells us that he didn't. Instead, what does God do? He has compassion on them. Instead of destroying them and starting over, he gives them a promise. He promises to send his very own Son to rescue them from sin. That's why Jesus came.

As Jesus looked out on that crowd in our text, he saw so many people who needed the compassion that only he could give. Matthew tells us: **"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them."** If you looked at the verses before our text, you see Jesus raise a daughter of a synagogue leader from the dead. He heals a woman who had some kind of bleeding condition that had been going on for 12 years. He gives sight to the blind. He enables the mute to speak. He drives out demons. No doubt that these were just a small sample of the people that Jesus began to heal. As word began to spread about Jesus and what he was doing, people began to flock to Jesus, bringing all of their sick friends and relatives. What does Jesus do? He has compassion on them.

Jesus saw all of their physical problems, to be sure. His healing activity is proof of that. But that's not where Matthew wants us to focus our attention. When Jesus looked at the crowd had compassion on them **"because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."** The picture behind that word that is translated **"harassed"** literally means *"lacerated"* or *"torn-up."* The picture is that of sheep being all cut up as they make their way through thick thorn bushes. As they are torn-up, the sheep become **"helpless."** They have no more strength to continue on by themselves.

Jesus saw a people that had no spiritual leadership, no shepherds. The leaders of the people, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were not caring for the sheep of Israel. Instead of caring for them, they were exhausting them with man-made laws that no one could possibly keep. Instead of hearing God's comforting words, they received no comfort. Instead of seeing an unending shoreline of people dying, he sees people who need Jesus to make a difference in their lives. **"He had compassion on them."** Literally, his *"guts were churning around inside of him."* His insides were burning with an intense love to help them. The beach was littered with starfish and one person wasn't going to get them all back into the ocean. Jesus solution: **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."** Jesus tells his disciples to pray for more workers. Ask God for more help to toss dying sinners back into the life-giving water of Jesus.

Jesus looks out over us today and sees people who are torn up by sin in their life. He sees people who are helpless. He sees people who could never keep all of God's laws. He sees people who are in trouble and could never possibly solve the problem of sin. Instead of giving us what we deserve, he has "**compassion**" on us. With that compassionate heart, he covers all of our sins. The burden of guilt has been removed off of your shoulders and placed on Jesus.

Then he says to each of us: *Go and be my witnesses. Share my compassion through compassion.* When we look at the people around us who do not know Jesus' compassion, the task can seem overwhelming, can't it? Can we reach all of those people? The simple answer is "no." But for each one that we can reach, it will make an eternal difference. As Jesus encourages all of us to be his witnesses, it can make a difference in one. If there are more witnesses, there will be more people who are brought to faith by the Holy Spirit. Let's ask God to help all of us to be *Witnesses through Compassion.* Amen.