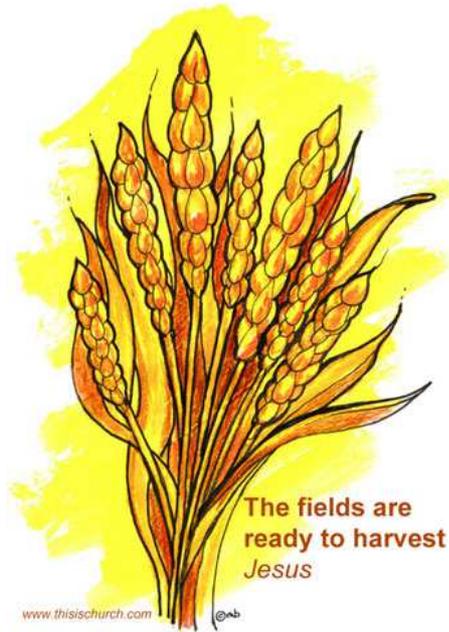


Matthew 9:35-10:8



Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of

the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than for that town.

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.' *NRSV*

Commentary

'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd'

Jesus looked around him and saw the crowds and he had compassion (GK. *splagchnizomai*) on the people. The word used for compassion is a powerful one, it means that Jesus had something like a blow to the stomach. It is a strong word, not something which means a mild pity, Jesus had a stomach churning response to the plight of ordinary people. Jesus understood that the people were harassed and confused and he hurt and agonized over the lost, the wounded, and the excluded.

Of course these words which Jesus spoke must have angered the religious authorities deeply. Jesus was criticising the religious system. When Jesus said the people were like 'sheep without a shepherd,' he was criticising the religious leaders who believed that they were very good shepherds and that the people didn't need anybody else. Jesus was angry at the lack of spiritual provision which was being made for the people and he was angry at the beliefs which were held at the time. The Pharisees saw the poor and the sick as those who were being punished by God for their sins, they should be kept away and excluded. Jesus welcomed the sick, the poor and the sinners and saw them as children of God.

Of course Jesus was motivated by the helplessness of the people into direct action and we need to be reminded that Jesus shows just how much God is not a distant unconcerned observer in our lives. God is distressed when he sees the lost and is prepared to give completely of himself, even to death on the cross. I am sure it is true that if Jesus had compassion on those people he met during his earthly ministry, then that compassion remains undiminished today. Jesus must be moved with pity as he looks upon so many people with deep spiritual need.

The Franciscan blessing:

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart. Amen.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace. Amen.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy. Amen.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done. Amen.