

The Second Sunday after Pentecost – 2020

Proper 6

Exodus 19:2-8

Romans 5:6-15

Matthew 9:35-10:20

On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the dedication of Christ the King Lutheran Church (While the actual celebration is delayed due to the lingering effects of the coronavirus and the ensuing lockdown).

You have seen some powerful things, majestic and vivid things. You have seen a single shaft of lighting coming out of the darkest clouds. Your eyebrows ascended, your eyes themselves widened in amazement, and your cones and rods danced with internal electricity. You have seen amazing things. Your eyes have embraced stunning things. The first time you stepped to the rim of the Grand Canyon, the expanse of what lay before you hit you with tremendous force. You immediately turned your head both left and right because you could not take it all in holding still. Your sight, your vision – what a gift! You have seen a bride, a bride that you loved in one way or another, present herself at the rear of the assembly and you rose to your feet, your heart taking in the fullness of marriage. If we could harvest the images of what you have seen and put them in a book it would be an instant hit, a world-wide best seller.

And yet there are things that you cannot see. Motives; one of the things that you cannot see are people's motives. One rule that Alise and I have when we argue, which is once every four or five years, is that neither one of us can ascribe to the other a particular motive for why one of us did something. She knows me pretty well, but she can't see my thoughts no matter how predictable I have become. There are things that you can't see. You can't see tomorrow. You can't see what lies within a person's character – deceit in Mildred, heroism in Jennifer, humility in Franklin. You can't see my failures – they aren't tattooed on my mug, where I regularly fall short and where I have begun to shore up my shortcomings.

Our Gospel text is so stunningly rich, so perfect for the occasion of our 50th anniversary, the 50th anniversary of the dedication of Christ the King Lutheran Church. In our text, Jesus was actively engaged, moving about from city to city *in order* to teach, *in order* to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and to heal the people. And St. Matthew includes this priceless line: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). His eyes, as the Lord of heaven and earth looked upon the crowds, His eyes, what did they see? More than you see; what is hidden from your eyes, the Master sees in vivid technicolor. He saw the forces at work in their lives. He saw their fears and their anxieties, their hopes and the condition of their hearts. The Lord Christ saw the struggles they endured and the realities that pressed down on them, that molded them. Those forces leapt into His eyes and into His heart. He was moved, the text says. Compassion; an active empathy was alive in God's Son as He gazed upon a small sea of humanity.

Harassed and helpless; have you ever felt this way? Too much – how many of y'all have felt this way too much? Do you know what are the principle forces at work to beat us down? This world is broken, fallen, sinful. Unbelief is a wretched force that plagues every society. Hatred and ignorance and pride animate our institutions, our neighborhoods, and our televisions. Unbelief

views life as a zero-sum game – I win, you lose; you win, I lose. The world itself is a force that leaves us harassed and helpless. Your own sin – your sinful condition and the actual sin you commit – it is a corpse that clings to you. Every believer, aware of their depravity, has cried out with St. Paul: “What a wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” The good you want to do, you don’t do. The evil you don’t want to do, this you find yourself doing. Sin eats at you. Guilt and shame are shadows over your heart, shadows that leave you feeling helpless and harassed. The Lord Christ sees you. His perception of your life and all that that entails, He knows. He knows that evil tempts you, that Satan whispers his lies to you, that fear and doubt and vanity can twist you in knots. He looked out on that crowd gathered before Him and He saw it all.

And He was moved. Compassion; it wasn’t an empty emotional moment for our Lord. Jesus acts. Intentionally, purposefully, congruently with what He saw – He acts in such a way as to address the issue as only God can. You need to make the connection. So that your trust may grow, so that your perceptive ability, the faithful eyes of your heart may be enlightened to see what Christ is doing now – you need to make the connection. After seeing the crowd, after truly seeing them and being moved with compassion, Jesus turns toward His disciples and He directs them toward the harvest, toward His church, toward sinners who must be ministered to. He dials the disciples into the need that is before them and then He sends them out – with authority – to cast out unclean spirits, to heal every disease and affliction, to proclaim the kingdom. A free gift to anyone and everyone, the lost, the forgotten, the marginalized, the least and the last, the helpless and harassed. The ministry of Christ Himself went out as His ambassadors carried His Word.

But it starts with compassion. What put our Lord on the Holy Cross? Was it evil men, or false witnesses or a Roman battalion? Did the Pharisees orchestrate the death of God’s Son? Was it Judas Iscariot? Was the betrayer the central actor that ensured that Christ’s blood was spilled on Good Friday? Was Pontius Pilate in charge of Christ and His cross – do you believe any of that? It was compassion, for you in your sin – compassion for you in your death that put Christ on the cross. God the Father saw all that is capable of being seen and that is why He sent His Son – born of a Virgin, born under the law to redeem those under the law. Compassion sent the eternal Word to be made flesh. Jesus is the embodiment of that compassion. He gave Himself for you on the cross but His compassion does not stop there. Jesus sees His church, His ministry – He foresaw you receiving what He has to give to you in your particular situation, in your personal moments, in your unique heart, your soul. You are the harvest He has always desired. You living in His church, receiving the corrective to what ails you, what leaves you helpless and harassed.

Compassion built this church, the One, Holy, Christian and Apostolic Church. Ongoing compassion for the crowds and for you. He acts. Then and now. He is present to give you the fruit of His compassion, the real-time fruit of His historic death and resurrection. That is why we gather – because He is here to give. Compassion built this church, Christ the King Lutheran Church of Redlands. An active and truly present divine compassion put brick and mortar together so that you might have a pulpit, an altar, a lectern and a font in this physical location. Compassion gives you a bible. Compassion gives you a pastor. Compassion gives you Holy Baptism. Compassion gives you Holy Communion. He sees you and so He dies, bearing your

sin. He sees you and so He establishes His church. He sees you and so He institutes the Office of Holy Ministry. He sees you and so He sets His table with His body and blood. He sees you and He loves you. He sees you and He washes you in His blood in a regenerating tide of holiness, death and resurrection. Compassion is all around you.

Fifty years of compassion in this place. Christ's active ministry – think of it. We have a shepherd, a Good Shepherd, one who provides the corrective for the harassment and helplessness we endure. Don't pretend that it isn't so. Let there be no defeated Christians in this place today. In this place our sins are absolved because Christ sees us and brings us forgiveness, full and free. Mourners, in the dark moments of piercing grief, mourners have heard of the resurrection here, and been emboldened to trust, strengthened for life. Compassion; manifested in this place! The Holy Spirit has brought us the fire of Christ's love when our faith was a smoldering wick. He breathes into us hope and our eyes are set on Christ and our future turns from grey to golden. We have a shepherd, a Good Shepherd, who calls us all by name. The corrective for our helpless and harassed circumstance is not generic spirituality, it is Easter. The Lord is risen and Easter is abundant in Christ's house; that is why we gather. We need the resurrection and Christ's church is a cup that overflows with resurrection.

Love between believers is a gift Christ gives. We share one another's burdens, we pray for each other and we laugh together. We have a common life and we love that life. It's Christ's life we share. We have a shepherd, a Good Shepherd. Christ the King leads us to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. Fifty years of grace; children who been taught in our Sunday School, confirmed in the faith, and who kneel at this altar. The cross is preached in this place so thoroughly that we get to know every splinter of it, and we treasure that cross. We learn how to deny ourselves, pick our own crosses and follow Him. We learn the commandments, how to please God by remaining sexually chaste, how to remain sober and humble and devout. We have learned to love justice, to protect the weak, to defend life, and to serve the Lord with our talents. Christ is active here, loving you, blessing you, giving Himself to you. We have learned not to apologize for our faith, not to apologize for the truth, not to apologize for what is good. We are more than helpless and harassed for Christ the King has made us more.

We sing here. We sing great hymns here. Our spirits are elevated above the chaos around us. The art! Such great art! But this is no religious museum. This is a living place, alive with the compassion of Christ. A blessed school is a product of Christ's compassion. So many little ones have received His love here, have received His Word. Our campus is a diamond, a visual triumph that is intended to tell everyone how much we value the Gospel – we love the Gospel so much we intend to make the place where it is preached as beautiful as possible. This is your home. No matter how soiled you may become, no matter what the world or the demonic or your own sin may do to you, this will ever be your home for this is Christ's church. He welcomes us. He reclines at table with us and shares His life. Compassion, love, and commitment – that is what you have found here. Why? Because Christ the King is here. I know that you see it.