

July 10, 2011
Pentecost 4

“Jesus’ Compassion for the Lost”

MATTHEW 9:34-10:8

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on 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 workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

¹ He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil^[a] spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^[b] drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

A couple of weeks ago we were driving through Yosemite National Park. If you have been there you know how busy the traffic can be on the valley floor of this beautiful park. As we were driving along the busy road, we noticed a little black bear walking alongside the road. It looked lost and confused. Would it ever find its mother? Would it venture out onto the road and be hit by a passing car? We feel compassion for animals that are lost or in danger such as the dog running down the side of the freeway, or the cat that ventures out into far into an open field where coyotes roam. Dare I bring up that day when you pet was sick and you were worried about it suffering and dying?

It is good to have compassion for animals but even better to have compassion for people, especially those who are lost eternally without Jesus. Jesus had compassion for people as he went through their towns and villages healing people and telling them the good news about the kingdom of God. He even prayed for his enemies as they were nailing him to the cross. Today, we would have you think about this compassion that Jesus has for the lost. We want a similar compassion and love for the lost and straying to be present in our lives as well.

We see this compassion in the way Jesus rescues the lost

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.” Jesus walked through the towns and villages expending himself in every way to establish contacts with people and teaching them about the kingdom of God. There were days when the disciples were worried about how tired and exhausted Jesus was. He spent his evenings in prayer

to his heavenly Father and his days from sunrise to sunset speaking to people and healing their diseases. Jesus never used his power as God to make it easier for him to walk from place to place, or to go without food. One of my favorite pictures of Jesus' is that of him sleeping in the boat as the disciples rowed across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus totally expended himself because of his deep love for people even those who rejected him.

Notice that it says Jesus preached the good news about the kingdom of God. He talked to people about the kingdom of God. What comes to your mind when you hear these words "the good news about the kingdom of God?" Picture your God coming to you as this mighty King of kings and Lord of lords. We have nothing to offer this mighty God to move him to accept us and love us and take us into his kingdom of love. We have nothing to offer him except lives of selfishness and disobedience. This good news of the kingdom is that this King comes to us and offers us the greatest treasure in the world. He does not offer us boxes of jewels and gold and silver. He offers us his love that was earned and won for us by the death of his Son that paid for our sin. Jesus proclaimed this good news of the kingdom to people. He summed up his message with the words, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." There is not greater joy in life than to be loved by God with this intense personal love. In Isaiah the Lord tells us, "I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine."

When Jesus saw the crowds of people coming to him, he had compassion on them. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." This word for harassed can also be translated as stripped, the way a vicious animal might strip the hide away from a poor helpless sheep. When sheep become lost they become very vulnerable to the wild animals that come running when they hear the sheep bleating for help.

At the time of Jesus false teachings were ripping into people and tearing them apart by the false teaching you can be part of God's kingdom and enjoy God's love by how much you try to live according to certain rules and regulations. I have heard people say, "My religion is the Golden Rule." They sincerely believe that they are loved by God by treating other people with respect and kindness. In the musical *The Sound of Music*, Maria reflects on how blessed she was to fall in love with Baron Von Trapp. She sings about doing something good in childhood to be so blessed by God. This past week a hiker was ripped apart by grizzly bear in Yellowstone National Park. It made the news. What did not make the news is how people are like lost sheep, being ripped apart and mangled by this false hope that things will be OK for them if they just do their best and hope in luck for all the rest.

Jesus had compassion on people who were lost. He loved them. He did not hesitate to tell them the truth that without him they will perish forever. This past week I was talking to Deb Ecklund and she remarked how deeply moved she was by the powerful article in the *Forward in Christ* magazine that spoke of Jesus as the only way back to God.

We see this compassion for people in the way Jesus compares it to a field that needs to be harvested. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." At the time of Jesus, they would cut the grain before it became fully ripe, place it into sheaves and then let it dry. If the grain was too dry, the seeds became loose and fell to the ground when they were cut with a

sickle. On our way to Yosemite two weeks ago, I notice how the grain fields east of Paso Robles were heavy with wheat from the lush winter rains. If you wait too long for the harvest the grain will be lost. So it is with people. There is always urgency for proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God to people. How much longer will it be before Jesus returns? How long can we wait before people die or become so hardened in their hearts that they will stubbornly resist the gospel message with a vengeance and hatred. Jesus asks us to pray for people who will go into the fields. And so we pray for people here within our own congregation who will rise up to be bold in proclaiming the message of the gospel to their friends, neighbors and family members.

We see this compassion the way Jesus chooses disciples to rescue the lost

What also amazes us about Jesus love for the lost is the way he chooses people to do the work of reaching the lost. "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness." Jesus gave the disciples an opportunity to use his power to heal people. Imagine how exciting it must have been to use the power Jesus gave to actually heal people from their sicknesses. That same power would be given again to the apostles after Jesus ascended into heaven.

What a privilege it is to be called by Jesus to show love and compassion to people as the disciples did. We do not have the same kind of power that they had, but we do have the power of prayer. We also have the opportunity of showing kindness and love to all people, even to our enemies as Jesus did. Galatians 6 tells us, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the household of faith." How many opportunities for showing love and kindness will you have this week? How many opportunities will the Lord give you in one day to help people with this amazing power of prayer that has been given to you and to me.

Jesus sent out his disciples into the towns and villages of Israel to find the lost sheep of Israel. "These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go preach this message, 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'" Jesus wanted his disciples to focus their attention on the people they knew the best, the lost sheep of Israel. Later there would be opportunities to proclaim the Word to other people. A good starting place for mission work is right in front of us as we pray for opportunities to bring the good news of the kingdom to members of our own family who may be lost or starting to drift away from Jesus.

Jesus asked the disciples to proclaim or preach the same message he was preaching. "The kingdom of heaven is near." He wanted his disciples to tell the good news to people about the kingdom of God, the same good news that Jesus also proclaimed to people. This past week I finished reading a very good little book called by Tim Keller called "The Prodigal God." It is based on the words of Jesus about the Prodigal or Lost Son." The word "prodigal" means "to spend until you have nothing left." We think of how the younger son took his portion of the family inheritance and spend it all in wild living. In this book Keller wants us to know that we have a prodigal God, a God who will spend everything including giving up the life of his Son just to redeem people like you and me. Jesus told stories like this to show how lost we are without him. In the father's loving arms we see the love our heavenly Father has for us in Jesus. That's the message the disciples proclaimed to

people. That's the message that we are privilege to proclaim and offer people.

I am going to close this sermon by going back to that little bear cub in Yosemite. That night, sitting around the campfire, I mention to Susan, "I just can't get that little bear cub out of my mind. I wonder what happened to it." My prayer for myself and my prayer for you this morning is that we will be more like Jesus in how we think about people. We want to think of how lost they are without Jesus, pray for them, and even ask the Lord to help us proclaim the good news of the kingdom to them as Jesus did. Amen.