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Pentecost 3

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“He Had Compassion”

Text: Matthew 9:36-10:20; Exodus 19:2-8; Romans 5:6-15

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Holy Gospel today, we heard that ***Jesus had compassion.***

If there's one sentence that summarizes Jesus, all that He is and all that He does, that just might be it. ***He had compassion. Pity. Sympathy.*** He sees what has become of us, men and women created in His image but now wracked with sin, and ***He has compassion.*** He sees what has become of His perfect creation, and the havoc sin has wreaked in it through and through and ***He has compassion.*** It wrenches His gut. He has so much better.

So ***He has compassion.*** And He *acts* in compassion.

First, Matthew tells us, in compassion Jesus teaches, ***proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.*** That is teaching by word and deed. Teaching of a God who is good in the midst of a world that is evil, and then giving that good by healing. Teaching that is needed, because the people had been and were being misled. Taught *wrongly*. Maybe by their own teachers. Certainly by the culture around them - the people around them and their false gods and false beliefs. That happens to us, too. The culture influences us. We are *catechized* by the world through all the information we receive - and not for the better. We maybe don't even realize how it has seeped into our thinking and effected us, and effected how we act and how we live, what we desire, and how we prioritize our lives. As funny as it may sound, we need to be taught what *good* is again. Oh, we *think* we know. But sin pulls us away from good, and if we read something in the Bible and then think, *Oh, that doesn't sound good! Or right! . . . But others are saying; others think . . .* then we *don't* know. We've been misled.

So ***Jesus has compassion.***

Because when Jesus ***saw the crowds***, he saw that they ***were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*** What do sheep without a shepherd do? They don't know what to do! They need to be told. They need to be led. They need to be

shepherded. Now think: Have you ever thought, or felt, or said, *I don't know what to do. I don't know where to turn. I don't know which way to go . . .* Then you are **harassed and helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd**. We don't want to be that. We don't want to admit it. We want to be smart and able and independent. And the devil convinces us that we are! Playing on our pride. That you can do it. Follow your gut. Trust yourself. If it feels good, do it. If it feels good, it can't be bad. You're smart, educated. Others might need a shepherd, but *not you!* You're okay! Strong. Able. But the one telling us that is the devil in shepherd's clothing, leading us astray, leading us to destruction, leading us into his jaws.

But you are only *like* sheep without a shepherd. Because you have a Shepherd, a Good one, who has come *to* you and come *for* you. So Jesus sees that, and **has compassion**.

So He tells His disciples to pray. *First thing* they should do. Whatever the problem or issue is, first thing: pray. In this case, **pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest**. Good advice for us, too. Sometimes we belittle prayer. We put that word *only* before it. I can *only* pray. We should **never** say that. I can *always* pray. That's better. No matter how young or old you are, whether the problem be close at hand or far away, you can *always* pray. Not everyone can. Not everyone believes. But you can. You can lift up people and problems and issues to your Father in heaven and know that He hears you. He promised. For you are His child. So that's not the *only* thing you can do, but the *best* thing you can do, to bring others before your Father in heaven who can do all things. You may not be able to do *anything*, but you can bring whoever, whatever, to the one who can do *everything*.

And chances are pretty good - like, 100%! - that He already knows how He will answer.

For right after telling His disciples to pray for laborers for the harvest, Jesus sends *them* out to *be* those laborers! And while the crowds **He had compassion** on were **like sheep without a shepherd**, the disciples will be **as sheep in the midst of wolves!** That must have been hard, to send His friends out like that. Like a soldier going off to battle, or a child going off to college. Hostile forces all around. But in compassion, Jesus does.

But as He does, as He sends them, *He arms them*. With His authority. The authority of His Word. And by His Word they will **cast out unclean spirits**, and **heal every disease and sickness**. They weren't just to *tell* people to get better or do better, but **give them better**. Give them Jesus and His gifts of forgiveness and life. **Have compassion** on them, as Jesus does. And they were to take nothing else - **acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics**

nor sandals nor a staff. Don't worry about that stuff! The God who created all things can supply all those things. Just take the Word. Be armed with the Word. ***Have compassion*** with the Word.

Which is also the case for the Church today. The Word is our only authority. It's really all we have. But it's all we need. It is enough. For this Word gives life. The Word teaching us, showing us, and giving us what is good. The Word casting out unclean spirits in the waters of Baptism, giving life in the forgiveness of sins, leading us to the green pasture of Jesus and feeding us with His Body and Blood. And this is true even when that Table is set *in the midst of our enemies* and we're walking *through the valley of the shadow of death* (Psalm 23:5, 4) in the midst of wolves. It is true even when it doesn't seem like it, when it looks like the Church is losing. When it seems we're losing the battle against a hostile and evil world, hell bent on sin and rebellion against God and His Word.

The Word is enough. For the Church is not about self-improvement, or fund-raising, or pumping ourselves up with a spiritual workout. It's not about bigness or power. It's not about us at all. **It's all about Jesus.** Jesus having compassion on us, and then we having compassion on others. And **a Church that has compassion will always have compassion.** The gifts of the compassionate one, and with them *the peace that passes all understanding* (Philippians 4:7).

Peace in a world where peace, where contentment, is hard to come by. Where compassion is dwarfed by criticism and competition. A world which has bought into evolution and the survival of the fittest. Every man, every woman out for himself or herself. Weed out the weak. Keep up or get run over. Achieve or get left behind.

How different the compassion of Jesus. Who didn't demand we *keep* up, but came to *lift* up those the world runs over and rescue those the world tosses aside. To die for those who deserve death - us. That we rise with Him to life. Good life. Compassionate life. Real life. Eternal life.

And for those who don't want that, there is a judgment coming. ***And it will be more bearable on that day,*** Jesus said, ***for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them.*** Which if you remember that story, is saying a lot! But that day is not yet. It may seem far away; it may seem like it will never come. The people of Israel may have thought that - living in Egypt as slaves for a very long time. *But that day came for them.* And the people of Israel waiting for the Messiah may have thought that day would never come. *But that day came for them.* And it will come for us, too. At the proper time. Which is maybe not soon enough for us! When life is hard, with battles from without and within, battles against foes and even against friends! When we're tired and weary. When the wolves seem to be winning . . .

And so still today, ***Jesus has compassion***, because we are ***harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd***. Still today He is sending workers into the harvest. Still today He is casting out unclean spirits, forgiving our sins, and giving life. Still today His Word is proclaimed and calling sinners to His gifts. Still today His gifts abound to give peace to troubled hearts, fearful consciences, and worried souls. For as Paul said in the Epistle we heard today, ***while we were still weak*** - harassed, helpless, cast down, frightened - ***Christ died for the ungodly. God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners***, - not after we cleaned ourselves up, or achieved enough, but ***while we were still sinners, Christ died for us***. And having ***been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. . . . Wrath against our sins. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many***.

Not that word: *abounded*. Not just a little grace; *abounding* grace! Grace greater than you can imagine. Grace without which we would be lost. But with such grace we are raised up, abounding in the love, forgiveness, and life of God, ***who has compassion on us***.

Be cause that's who God is and what He does. ***He has compassion***. That one sentence summarizes Father, Son, and Holy Spirit pretty well. ***He has compassion***. Compassion for you. Compassion for all.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.