

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 4
June 28, 2020
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
Theme: A heart for the lost

—Matthew 9:35-10:8

An anthropologist once made this observation: We tend to lump people into one of three categories—scenery, machinery, or real people. In the first category, most of the people we see are just a part of the scenery as we drive around town and pass through the grocery store. We have no interaction with them. The second category is machinery. These are people with whom we interact on a purely transactional basis. So again you are at the grocery store and the guy who slices your meat at the deli and the woman who rings you up are machinery people. But the people whom you know by name and have a relationship with have a real impact on you. You care about them, you think about them, you remember them, and you are concerned about them.

In our lesson for today, Jesus encounters crowds and crowds of people as he passed through various towns and villages in Galilee. But for Jesus, he didn't consciously or subconsciously lump people in categories. Not a single face blended into the scenery for Jesus. Jesus did not view a single person as merely a warm body to serve a menial task. No. Each person was a very real person to Jesus with a real, essential need. **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** Jesus truly has a heart for people.

Do you have such a heart for people? When you're surrounded by millions of people or even just hundreds or dozens, it's easy to become numb to the fact that everyone we come into contact with is a real person. They're not just scenery or machinery. They are real people with real problems and real spiritual needs, just like you. When we come into contact so many people it's easy to become indifferent or callous or simply unaware of the people that are right in front of us. Why is that?

It might be because we expend a lot of energy and time thinking about ourselves. Or it might be a pride issue. If you come into contact with someone whose life appears to be a total mess and he is so spiritually lost you might think, "Man, what did he do to mess up his life?" And maybe he did make a lot of bad choices that led to such pain. But don't replace compassion for that lost soul with the arrogance of that one Pharisee who looked at a tax collector, "Lord I thank you I'm not like him because I have my life together." Maybe at times our hearts grow cold for the lost and spiritually helpless because we forget how lost we once were or how lost we would be if it weren't for the grace of God. Indifference for people, not caring about people, is also indifference for Jesus. Saying or even thinking "I could care less about people" is really like saying, "I could care less about Jesus." And if you'd like to contest that point, flip ahead to Matthew 25 where Jesus says, **"I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."**

There's one person who could truly walk through the streets of our cities and into our lives and without a hint of arrogance or hypocrisy say, "What a mess. They deserve to die on the vine and perish eternally." As the righteous Judge, Jesus would truly be justified in saying that. But as the compassionate Savior, he has a heart for people. He has a heart for you. When you were lost and dead in sin, he had compassion on you. You didn't blend into the crowd of humanity. But to Jesus you are a real person with real spiritual needs, and so he laid down his life for you. As he once walked through the streets of Galilee calling people to repentance and preaching the good news, he calls you to repentance and preaches the good news. He calls us to repent of indifference and apathy toward people and any other sin, and he freely forgives our indifference and apathy and any other sin. He doesn't write us off or pass us by. Freely he has brought us into his kingdom of grace.

Jesus Christ has a heart for you. He has a heart for people— a heart for the billions in the world; the millions our valley, the tens of thousands in your city, the dozens in your neighborhood; a heart for the one lost soul that might be right in front of you. Where you and I might see hopelessness and despair, Jesus sees opportunity for gospel ministry. He sees sheep in need of shepherds. He sees a field ripe for harvest. So he said to his disciples, **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."** And then, he answers that prayer by calling his twelve disciples, the Apostles, to that ministry of preaching the good news Jesus Christ.

The same ministry exists today. We have an example right here at Emmanuel. I stumbled across an old picture directory for Emmanuel and you know what jumps off the page? Yes, there is a picture of the building. There are few pages highlighting different programs and activities. But what should stick out is the people. As I flip through here, I see lots of people. Some I recognize. Some are still here today. Some are with the Lord. Some have

strayed. Many I've never met and know nothing about. But they're all real people, dearly loved by Jesus. Jesus didn't come to set up merely a visible organization or to establish this program or that program. He came to save the lost. He came to harvest souls in danger of perishing for eternity. He came to rule the hearts of people with peace and love. It's about serving people with the gospel. That's why you come here, isn't it? You come to be served by the gospel. You come to the Lord's Table with very real spiritual needs. And in a very real and personal way, Jesus gives you exactly what you need—the forgiveness of sins.

I don't just see faces in this directory or faces in the pews. I see many more faces all around. I don't know hardly any of them. But I know that so many of them need what only Jesus offers. And I know that Jesus has a heart for each one of them. I pray that we can all share that same heart for people. That doesn't mean that you have to be what some call a "people person" with a gregarious personality. But having a heart for people means viewing people as Jesus does. It's making a conscious effort see every person as a real person with a soul and real spiritual needs. It's recognizing the family that lives in your neighborhood and the people right here in our community are in desperate need of what you come here to receive. I know the numbers are overwhelming, especially in such a big city. Where do you start? ***"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."***

Start by praying! Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers in to the harvest field. Pray for the spread of the gospel here and everywhere. And realize that what Jesus said still holds true today. I copied this from our District President's most recent report:

This year 26 candidates from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary presented themselves for calls into the pastoral ministry. We received two candidates assigned to congregations in our district. At the conclusion of the assignment process, there were many more requests for pastor candidates from around the synod that could not be filled. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field!

Consider the need. The need that people in our communities everywhere have for Jesus Christ, and consider the need our church body has for worker in those harvest fields. Do you know a young man who has the gifts and the heart for the pastoral ministry? Encourage him. Do you know a young woman or a young man who shows potential for the teaching ministry? Encourage him or her. Or if you wondering what to do for a career the ministry has crossed your mind, talk to a pastor or a teacher. ***"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."***

God has not given everyone a heart for the public ministry. And that's ok! It doesn't mean you can't have a heart for people and a heart for sharing God's word. You are a vital part of the body of Christ. You support the work of the gospel through your offerings. You are also equipped to share the simple gospel of Jesus in your personal life. If you don't think you are, we're here to equip you. As I've been teaching Bible Basics here for almost six years now, I would say almost half of the people who have taken the class showed up because a member of Emmanuel invited them and in many cases the member came to the class with them. Maybe someone comes to your mind that you might invite to a class or to church—a soul that's harassed and helpless, like a sheep with out a shepherd just wandering through life without real hope. Remember the heart that Jesus has for that soul. He has compassion on the lost. He has a heart for people.

To Jesus there are no unfamiliar faces or random people. Only real people with real needs. As Christ has had compassion on you, may he give us a heart like his—a heart for people. Amen.