

## **Jesus Looks with Compassion**

### **Homily for Matthew 9.35–10.8**

**8am service 14<sup>th</sup> June**

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Our Gospel this morning begins with Jesus travelling through the towns and villages of Galilee.

Matthew presents a picture of tireless ministry. Jesus is teaching, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing. Wherever he goes, people gather around him.

Then Matthew pauses the action and allows us to see what is happening within Jesus himself.

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

Everything that follows grows out of that moment.

Jesus sees the crowds.

He sees their confusion, their burdens, their longing for guidance and hope. The word Matthew uses for compassion here is a powerful one. He uses the root greek word 'splanchna', which speaks of a deep movement "to be moved in the inward parts" "to be stirred to the depths of one's being"

Jesus is not simply observing people. He is drawn towards them in mercy and love.

The ministry of Jesus begins with attention.

He notices people.

He sees them as they are.

He allows their need to touch his heart.

That is worth pondering because it is easy to move through life without really seeing what is before us. We can become occupied with our own concerns, our own routines, our own responsibilities. Yet throughout the

Gospels, Jesus remains attentive to people. Again and again, he sees those whom others overlook and responds with compassion.

Matthew wants us to understand that the mission of God begins in the compassionate heart of Christ.

What follows is equally striking.

Jesus says 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."

Notice what he asks them to do.

He asks them to pray.

The need is obvious. The crowds are large. The harvest is plentiful. Yet Jesus directs the disciples first towards prayer. The harvest belongs to God. The mission belongs to God. The future belongs to God. Before the disciples do anything, they are invited to recognise that they are dependent upon the Lord of the harvest.

There is wisdom in that for the Church in every age. When we see the needs around us, our first instinct is often to ask what we can do. Jesus teaches us first to ask what God is doing, and how we may join in with his work. Prayer is often the beginning of mission.

Then Matthew gives us a wonderful surprise. Jesus tells the disciples to pray for labourers. And then, he sends them out.

The very people who are praying for workers become the workers for whom they are praying. The answer to their prayer is, in part, themselves.

I suspect many Christians have discovered the same thing. We pray for the Church, and God gives us some small part to play in its life.

We pray for those who are lonely, and God creates opportunities for us to offer friendship.

We pray for the growth of faith, and God gives us occasions to speak a word of encouragement or hope.

Often our prayers gradually open our eyes to the work God is already inviting us to do.

That invitation does not always involve something dramatic.

Most Christian discipleship takes place in ordinary settings: within families, among friends, in places of work, through acts of kindness, generosity, patience and faithfulness. Yet these ordinary acts become part of God's harvest.

The disciples in today's Gospel are sent out with authority and purpose, but the source of their mission remains the compassion of Christ. They are sharing in what they have first received from him.

The same is true for us.

We gather around this altar week by week to receive God's grace, to hear his word, and to be renewed in faith. Then we are sent back into the world that God loves.

The Gospel invites us to see as Christ sees, to pray as Christ teaches, and to serve where Christ sends.

And perhaps this week we might pay particular attention to that simple sequence in the Gospel.

To notice.

To pray.

To respond.

For it is often in that way that the Lord of the harvest continues his work among us.

Amen.