

## **Sermon Text – Sunday, June 14, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Exodus 19:2-8; 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Romans 5:1-8  
Scripture for the Message: Matthew 9:35-10:8 “Response”**

There are a lot of things that humanity can accomplish to bring God's kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” In this scripture reading from Matthew, Jesus has compassion on the crowds and as he looks at them, he makes that statement to his disciples. He tells them “Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” That is exactly what Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, does; he summons the twelve and gives them authority to do the work he has started. He gives them authority to proclaim the good news that ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ He finishes his instructions by telling them that they should not expect payment for doing this work. This is a lesson for them to rely on God for their provisions.

Jesus sees the need that is widespread among the people, they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus' work is the result of the compassion and love he has for the people. There is a compelling message of grace and forgiveness in this scripture. Jesus does not put qualifications on which people he heals or on who he shows compassion, mercy, and grace. Jesus went to all the cities and villages and cured every disease and every sickness.

You can put this scripture alongside what we have read from Exodus and from Paul's letter to the Romans and the message about continuing Jesus' work comes through. Paul writes that we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus, and the hope of sharing the glory of God. These things are what should compel us to be “laborers” for the harvest. In Exodus we can hear the Israelites respond to God out of gratitude for what God had done for them, “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

Matthew tells us that Jesus responds to the crowds with compassion and sends out the “laborers.” Paul gives examples of what God has done for us out of steadfast and everlasting love for creation. “God proves God's love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us.” An appropriate response for Jesus' followers would be to take seriously the authority given them and be ambassadors for Christ in the places they are sent. The twelve were motivated to accept the authority given them out of gratitude for what they had seen Jesus do. Our “labor” should be in response to what God has done for us, labor born of our gratitude rather than from obligation.

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What Jesus asks of his followers is hard – take no payment is not a natural thing in our capitalistic society. Those who give without asking anything in return might be thought foolish and taken advantage of today. There might be something wrong with the world when humanity cannot respond to gratitude without ridicule.

There are a lot of things that a community could accomplish for God's kingdom – “The harvest is plentiful.” Can a community of believers, given authority by Jesus, do the work Jesus has started? Maybe we don't have the power to cure diseases or cast out demons, but we do have power to ease suffering, to show mercy, to do justice, and to walk humbly with God. We do have the authority to take God's message to the lost people of the world. A community of believers in today's world can stand up and say, “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

The Lord needs laborers for the harvest and one challenge for today is that the church lacks laborers. We, the church, have the authority to do the work Jesus started in the world – to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger and alien, and look after the sick. The big question is, where do we find the energy for doing what we have the authority to do? How do the leaders of a community of believers become the laborers that God needs? How do we, as a community of believers, express our gratitude for what God has done? Think about what would happen in God's kingdom if those who only want to “observe” worship chose instead to participate and become active in God's kingdom.

I don't have answers to those questions, I believe that we become active in God's kingdom, laborers so to speak, out of a response to what God has done for us. I guess if we don't believe God has done anything for us, we can choose not to do anything in response – but face it, who here can say that God has not acted in their life in some fashion. We are gathered here as disciples to learn from the teachings of Jesus and then we are sent out as apostles to do as Jesus does – that is the role of Christians, which is the role of a community of believers.

We have authority to take God's message to the lost people of the world. Think about how we recognize the lost. Let me say that not everyone we might perceive as lost is lost. We recognize the lost only with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The followers of Jesus who are given authority to do his work include us, all believers, everyone in this community of believers. Authority comes to us as we are able and called to respond to the “world” with compassion, mercy, and justice.

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One thing I think the church needs to consider is do we take seriously Jesus' call to be laborers into his harvest. Because, if we do, we need to ponder just how to do that. We might consider how we can nurture that authority among the believers gathered here. The way we live into the authority given us is going to be different from how the twelve apostles exercised their authority. I am thinking demons can be cast out as we believers in Christ follow his example of willingness to offer grace and compassion to everyone we encounter in this world, the ones who might be experiencing demons. I am thinking that those who are "spiritually dead" in our society can be raised up as we believers in Christ work to "resurrect" hope in our society. I also believe that dis-ease can be cured by believers in Christ as we offer prayer, comfort, and compassion to those who are "sick." Of course, this isn't going to look the same as in first century Judea because we are not the same and our world is not the same.

Going back to our scripture reading from Matthew, Jesus had compassion when he saw the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Indeed, the laborers are few, shepherds are a rare commodity these days. Rather than lament that fact, however, we are given the authority to go and proclaim the good news that "The kingdom of heaven has come near." We, the church, have been given the authority to be the hands and feet of Christ bringing transformation to a world in need of compassion and mercy.

Jesus' work is unfinished; we can look around and see that there are many people in need of compassion. There are many areas of our world needing to hear God's message of good news. There are many nations that would benefit from knowing what it would be like to live within the nation or kingdom of God. The unfinished work of Jesus is what the church must be about. We can sit around in our pews and tell each other, "Indeed, the laborers are few, indeed, the harvest is plentiful." That, however, doesn't finish the work.

There are a lot of things that can be accomplished in God's kingdom. Maybe with more laborers. But I wonder, I look around within and outside these walls and I see laborers – or those who can be laborers if they can live into the authority Jesus' gives them. Laborers who might have energy to finish Jesus' work when they respond with the same compassion Jesus had for the crowds. Laborers who, with their lives as examples, can show the world the same compassion, same mercy, same grace, and the same forgiveness that they

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themselves have been shown. If a community of believers can do that, they can be the laborers able to finish preparing the field for God's harvest.

Face it church, there is not one thing we can do for God – God needs nothing from us. There are multitudes of things God has done for us, and we are able to respond by “doing” for God's creation. Give love and hope where love and hope are lacking and show through our living example what the family of God looks like.