

In our Old Testament reading today, Moses was speaking to God just before the nation of Israel entered the promised land of Palestine. It had been a difficult journey, facing off against Pharaoh to leave Egypt and then the extra forty year detour through the desert because the initial generation failed to trust God. There were lots of trials and hardships in the meantime and Moses put up with a lot from the people to lead them safely to their new home. And now they were there. But because Moses had lost his temper and failed to follow God's instructions once, he would not receive this reward. The people would go on without him. And yet where most of us would cry foul and throw a fit, did you notice what the content of Moses' speech to God was? He asked that the people not be left without a strong leader, so they will not become like sheep without a shepherd.

Moses knew the people needed a guide, they needed help or they would quickly be lost again by giving over to their sinful nature. His primary concern was not his own personal gratification or glory, it was what would happen to the people when he was gone. And over a thousand years later, not too far from that spot, Jesus looks out over the crowds and sees the results of lacking a proper shepherd in our gospel today. <Read text: Mt 9:35-10:8>.

The leadership in Jesus' day was not doing their job shepherding the people and so he saw the crowds as they were, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. The leaders of their nation were supposed to be directing them all to the true God, the Lord and teaching them how to follow his ways and his commands, how to live in his mercy and through it all, how the Lord would save them from their sins and bring them to eternal life with him. Instead, the leaders under a guise of piety had been pushing their own rules and laws that simply came down as a burden on the people. Nowhere was the mercy of God found. And so you had those who rose to the ridiculous challenge of the rabbinic laws and were praised by the people for their holiness, the Pharisees. Or, you had those who just said they couldn't do it and acted out wherever they liked in their own sinful nature.

Jesus' reaction when he saw these people lost in their own sin, helpless because they lacked the guidance they needed, Jesus saw them and had compassion on them. He wanted to help them, to make it better. He felt bad for the situation they were in and he wanted to change it for them. Now I want to ask, how do you feel when you see the lost sheep of today? How do you feel about the person who deliberately cheats you out of a deal? Out of someone who swerves in to take your parking spot? Who yells at the cashier in front of you because they didn't get what they feel entitled to? The people we meet every day who have no shepherd over them and spend their lives trapped in a cycle of selfishness that they can't break out of?

You may have figured out from the way I describe them that although we can be tempted to get frustrated or angry at these people, ultimately they are in a position to be pitied. Sure, it's easy to think of how they negatively impact your life, but that's selfish thinking, which is the main problem overall. Compare your life as someone who knows your shepherd to one of those lost sheep who does not. If you can even imagine it, what must it be like for those people? What is it like to have this life be your only chance at happiness? What is it like to have no hope that things will always come out for the best? What is it like when you have only yourself to turn to in times of distress? And all the time within to have nothing but the sinful nature rule over you, to be dominated by selfish thoughts no matter how hard you might try?

It's no wonder these lost sheep lash out and hurt those around them. It's a depressing and lonely existence that they likely don't even realize. And the worst of it is, even though they may realize that something about their life is "off" and bug them from under their skin, they can't, on their own, realize exactly how much trouble they are really in. They don't know that without a shepherd, without the guidance and help of God himself, they are going to do more than just die when this life is over, they are going to die forever in hell. Remember all this when you encounter the lost sheep of this world. They are in trouble. They need your help.

To say that you shouldn't help them because they've hurt you, because they only ever antagonize you, or because they don't deserve it is a very dangerous statement. Don't you remember that you were once lost, too? We all came into this world lost and helpless. We all entered sinful, with the same damnation hanging over our heads. It was because someone else took the time to shepherd us, despite our selfishness and sin, that we sit here today better than we once were. Because of someone else that we know about how our savior Jesus has rescued us from our sin. Because of the Holy Spirit working in us that we trust God to save us and by the power of the Holy Spirit that we're able to overcome the core of selfishness within us at any given moment. Not because we're better people, not because we found our own way, but because someone else helped us and showed us our true shepherd. And because our shepherd

Jesus did all the work for us as our leader. We're not better than any of the people who still need this. We didn't deserve it any more than they do, but just like us, they *need* it.

There is still another problem though, beyond just recognizing that these people need a shepherd. Jesus himself comments on it to the disciples here. "**The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few,**" he says. Consider how many there are who don't know their shepherd Jesus compared to how many are trying to reach them. Not even comparing unbelievers to believers. Unbelievers to just those who are actually trying to reach them with the truth of God's word. It's overwhelming, and frankly more than a little depressing when you just consider that. But Jesus has a plan. He gave the disciples a solution, his plan hasn't changed since then. "**Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send workers into his harvest field.**"

There's not enough workers? Ask God for more! Simple as that! Let's not forget this. Let's not lose sight of this basic lesson. If you have a problem, *start* with asking God for help. Every. Time. Doesn't matter if he's going to use you alone to fix it. He's the one who gives you the abilities and know-how and everything else you need. Ask his help. And in this case the problem really is beyond any one of us. So pray for workers.

Now, I want us to understand workers in the full sense here. We need to be praying for any kind of person who will take the time to share Jesus with someone who needs it. Not just the full-time called worker that we sometimes think of. And yet, I think it's appropriate right now to add in an extra prayer for that kind of person. Our church body at large is facing a shortfall of trained men to shepherd local flocks. The so-called baby-boomer generation is retiring and the classes coming through our schools to replace them aren't half the size they need to be. Pray for workers in general, but in the coming days, also pray that God would move more young men to consider the full-time ministry in their lives.

Of course, like I said, those aren't the only workers that exist. The disciples were hardly trained properly at this point and yet what does Jesus do just after he asks the disciples to pray for workers? He makes them the very workers they prayed for. He sends them out to preach and teach the good news of Jesus primarily, and also to help and heal where they can. Brothers and sisters if you're going to pray for workers to help the lost (and you should be), then you need to be willing to be those workers yourselves.

How many of us, in our lives as Christians, have lamented the state of the world? Have expressed concern about the path the nations are on and perhaps more importantly been distressed about the size of God's flock compared to the size of the lost flock? We've all probably complained about this problem on one level or another and yet how many of us have taken the time to do something about it? I don't mean social change, I mean a personal change in someone else. If you want the world to be a better place (it's never going to be perfect of course, but maybe just a little better) or if you want God's flock to be bigger, then the solution is the same either way. Teach someone else about Jesus. Change either way is going to happen in the heart and only the Word of God changes hearts to believe for salvation and live for God today.

If you're going to complain about the problem, be part of the solution. Share Jesus with someone who needs it. This is how people are saved in our day. People don't trust corporate structures. People don't trust strangers. People are extremely skeptical of being "sold" on something or scammed out of something. Trust in the church in general is at an all-time low. If someone's going to listen about Jesus, it has to come from someone they know and trust as a person. You have those kind of relationships. Use them to reach people with the truth that will save them.

God has given you everything you need to do this, just like the disciples in our reading. He has promised you have what you need. And what you really need is his word. That's what you need to share. The message is simple. And frankly, if you don't feel you know it well enough to share it with someone else, that might be a sign you need to do a little more studying of it yourself. But take it out there. Be the worker you pray for God to send. Reach people with his truth so they can be rescued. If not you, then who else is going to? You literally have nothing to lose. Everything you think you might have to lose, whether it's respect or pride or a friendship...those are temporary and meaningless compared to eternity. Yours won't be taken away from you. Theirs might never happen if you're not willing to put those minor things on the line in order to teach them about their savior.

My brothers and sisters workers are needed to save souls this day. People will die unless God is brought to them. See those people as they are, harassed and helpless. Pray for workers so they can be rescued. Take what God has given to you and use everything to *be* those workers. Help God save others just like he has already saved you. Amen.