

**Proper 6 (A)**

*Matthew 9:35-10:8*

*“Freely Received, Freely Given”*

*”These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them ... ‘You received without paying; give without pay.’”*

### **Introduction**

I had no reason to doubt the man. His need seemed genuine. His story? Desperate. And so, out of a devout desire, I proceeded to help him. I welcomed him into my home, opening my heart to him his plight. I listened to his story, drove him to his destination, where he said, more help would be waiting.

Yet, after arriving “there” (being as of yet unfamiliar with the city, I didn’t know where “there” actually was), I realized things were not what they had first appeared to be. In fact, I began to sense a growing danger, as my “friend” no longer seemed to need my presence or concern. He cared nothing for my compassion or the Savior who bore it in me. He only wanted my money. (I’m still not sure as to the bulge in his jacket.) Where, all I knew at one point was that I needed to get him out of my car. And as I watched him disappear around the corner with my cash and my compassion, I felt nothing but rage. I felt used. I uttered words that I rarely utter (God, damn and you). I trembled, where, with tears in my eyes and hatred in my heart, I vowed, “Never again ... never again!”

It was, to say the least, a hard lesson in the school of compassion, reflecting a test that I’m sure we’ve all taken, where, at one time or another, the grade in this course of compassion *may* be appreciation, or an arm cast about our necks.

Yet, there will be others times when we will get burned. Our kindness and compassion will be spurned. We will be taken advantage of, or laughed at. What then? Will ours be the cry of “Never again,” or perhaps “Not at all to begin with”?

Or, with the heart of Christ, a prayer of faith, and the gifts of His grace, will we venture still into the fields of the Lord to fulfill the task of ministry in His name?

**Main thought:**

**As we have graciously and freely received of the promises and blessings ... of forgiveness and life in abundance, through Christ, let the Pentecost people of God (that is, *this* Pentecosts people of God) freely bestow those gifts on others through Word and deed.**

Then, we will be servants. Then, we are Church! Amen.

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Our text for this morning overflows with Words of encouragement for those who would administer compassion in the Lord's name. Where, the first glimpse we get into this Word is that humanity's need seems an unfathomable pool.

*<sup>35</sup> And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

The need was great ... one long continuous and steady stream, waiting on God, looking – begging – for mercy in a world that is in short supply of both. Note the word to describe them – “*harassed*.” The fishermen among us would know it, as it literally means “flayed.” It’s a picture of sheep, cut up and shredded, as after passing through a heavy patch of thorns. In this case, these ones are cut up with worry, with anxious thoughts about life. They are shredded with pain and uncertainty. They are seeking comfort, but are unable to find it. They are in a continuous state of helplessness, laid low and literally “thrown off,” abandoned. Their only need is healing and peace.

It's not unlike our world today, though folk at times may not realize it. But we see it – perhaps even in ourselves. In the faces of people who sit at the bedside of their terminally ill friend or family member ... in the darkness of depression and despair – of hopelessness ... in the hearts of those who carry the silent burden of making their way in an increasingly violent world?

*“The harvest is rich and plentiful.”* Even in our own circles, there are so many who hurt, who are in need of something ... a clear indication that it is not a matter of opportunity, but a matter of God's people who rise to the occasion, to fill the moment ... a field ripe and in need of immediate attention.

What does that image evoke in you? For Jesus, when He saw the crowd, the text says He had “compassion” ... a Word that does not even begin to convey the depth of emotion that Christ felt in Himself. To have compassion, as Jesus did, meant that the “heart, liver, kidneys and lungs were moved” ... with force! It means that in His emotion ... He is violently rent ... that pain and suffering are felt to the very core of His being.

It is what one might call an “on the cross moment,” a time foreshadows Jesus taking on the sins of the world – *ex crucis!* That this one – even *you* and I – make a difference to Him ... that not one of them – not one of *us* – would escape His mercy, that not one of us would get away without receiving something from His gracious hand! (It's that proverbial “starfish” moment.)

*They* matter. *We* matter. As are *all* who are in need of a Word of hope and encouragement from Him. This is the message of life Jesus brings, that none should be lost because there was no one to care for them, because there was no one to tell of Him, to lead them to life in His name! This we all have received – “Your sins are forgiven you” – in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Where what follows is perhaps one of the greatest human experiments of all time!

Where Jesus says, “Folks, I’m not going to kid you. It’s huge! I mean the harvest is big ... *real* big! And to make the situation all the more urgent, the field is in immediate need of attention.” (Of course, we all know what can happen if the produce is left in the field too long, or in our case, in the bottom of the drawer or back of the refrigerator! How many cucumbers or bananas have gone the way of our text!?)

So, “*Pray ... pray the Lord for workers.*” As if to say, we don’t make ourselves into workers. Jesus will do it. That divine mission is a divine matter, and God will purpose its way and its means. If God’s people but “*pray.*”

But, as the saying goes, “Be careful what you pray for.” Because no sooner do the disciples pray the Lord to “throw out” workers into the fields, Jesus says, “Guess what, your prayer has been answered. And Good News ... *you’re* it!”

To be sure, prayer never becomes a substitute for action, no more than simply writing a check. But we pray with the full realization that we ourselves, like the disciples, may well be the answer. Indeed, we are the answer by virtue of our Baptism into His name. We are the answer by virtue of the gifts we have received – of Baptism, Faith, Church, Body & Blood. Luther: “*Omnia accipias gratis et omnia facias gratus.* “May you receive all for nothing and do all grateful(ly).” Or Jesus: “*You have received without paying; give without pay.*”

Which seems a clear recipe for disaster. Like sending out people who are prone to having a temper, to doubt and unbelief ... who would, just as well desert Jesus, then remain by His side. I mean, this seems a huge risk, when considering folks who would just as soon call fire down from heaven than heal, or who, when push comes to shove, are more concerned with their own position in the kingdom than to give one wit for the likes of those whose lives are shattered by the overwhelming circumstances of life. “An experiment in insanity” some would say?

And that may well have *been* the case, were it not for something that this world didn't expect, something that most still don't expect ... of something totally undeserved, but given – a gift – freely given ... totally, without cost!

Given first and foremost to us. But then, entrusted to us to intentionally give away. A gift and the giving that doesn't depend on us, but on the Lord's own Word and promise, bestowed with an authority that still carries with it the power to create and redeem – a Word that can still change lives ... that still accomplishes the purpose for which it has been sent. (Isaiah 55:10, 11) ... that still is “*the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.*” (Romans 1:16, 17)

Yes, to be sure, we may well be ordinary. But we serve an extraordinary Savior ... One greater than our sin ... One greater than Satan and his attempt to sow seeds of discord ... One bigger than this world and all its problems and pain they cause ... with Good News enough to go around ... a Savior who has effected the holy cure – the washing away of our sin ... of peace with God because of sin *freely* and forever forgiven!

Now, I know what some of you are going to say (because I've said it myself). Yes, it won't be original, as many before you have raised the same objection – Moses, David, Isaiah to name a few. You're going to say “But I can't do that.”

And I will say, “Yes, that is true.” But you will go forth, not because of anything in you. But in Him ... we will lack no good thing to fulfill the mission on which He now sends us. We have His Word and His authority. We have the means in water, in bread and wine. We have the ... body! We need nothing else, but to once again hear the call ourselves, and to go. “*Freely you have received; freely give!*”

Again, just ordinary folks. Like us. But ones whom the Lord has chosen to bring to Himself out of grace. Ones to whom He now gives a joy and thanksgiving unsurpassed.

Wherein, just think – throughout the Scriptures – how many were blessed, simply by association. Like Potiphar and his house, where we read “were blessed because of Joseph’s presence. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field.” (Genesis 39:5) And all this because of association with a slave. Or Jacob, whose blessings spilled over on the deceitful Laban, leading even Laban to admit, “the Lord has blessed me because of you.” (Genesis 30:27) Or the house of Obed-Edom, when David housed the Ark of the Covenant at his home for few months ... “whom the Lord blessed because of the ark of God.” (2 Samuel 6:12) Or the whole land of Obadiah, who in the time of the persecution of the prophets of God, housed 50 of them in two caves to protect them, and then took to feeding them at the risk of his own life. (1 Kings 18:13) “Savior’s of the land,” they are called and remembered.

To be blessed by association, we might call it. Where, it is true: “The ungodly fare well because of the godly. The evil enjoy the blessings of the saints, whom they hate, even though all good things fall to their lot because of their association with the godly and as a result of the blessing of the godly.” (Luther)

And so Christ through His own! Christ through *you*, “not by your own reason or strength,” but with what He promises us and equips us with through His own deep compassion, out of His own continual strength ... with His own power and blessing! Amen.

### **Conclusion**

“Never again ... never again!” By God’s grace I have not kept that promise ... privileged to sit at the bedside of the dying ... to witness the miracle of rebirth at the font of His blessing ... to administer God’s grace from this (and other) altar ... to grow in love for His Word ... to join with my family in worship ... where all of us have received, and receive from the One who still has “*compassion on them all.*”

*“You received without paying; give without pay.”*

May all that you do and say for Him this week, be done in the grace and the strength of His name, where all life matters – and is deserving of divine service rendered in His name. *Amen.*