

and over again. Day after day. He is working to tear you down until you feel harassed and helpless. Until you wonder whom you can trust. So Jesus sends out pastors so that there could be someone who can constantly remind you that Jesus cares for you. So you can be built up with God's love. You need that. You need me! Jesus' compassion for us is the reason pastors exist.

So can I ask you something? Would you pray for me today? I'm not asking because I'm selfish. I say that because I need it. I told you earlier what I see when I look at you—bored and tired—and you smiled because it's not really who you are. So what do you see when you look at me? Do you think that's really who I am? You want to know who I am? I am a person who is harassed and helpless and completely dependent on my Savior Jesus—just like you! With doubts and fears and temptations. So I need you. I need you to tell me that Jesus cares for me too. Would you pray for me? Do you see how wonderful this arrangement is to be between pastors and people?

And when was the last time that we together prayed that God would send out more pastors into the world? Jesus says, "*Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.*" It's hard to think of a more beneficial or necessary thing to pray for. The harvest is plentiful and the workers are few! Back in 1979, when Pastor Degner graduated from our Seminary, there were 70 graduates. Last month, our Seminary graduated 23 new pastors. Just think about that. There lots of pastors nearly pondering retirement. There are few pastors ready to fill their places.

So whom could you encourage to be a pastor? What young man or even little boy could you encourage to think about making a career out of telling people Jesus cares for them? You don't have to be a pastor's kid to be a pastor! Pastor Degner's dad was a farmer. Pastor Rauh's dad worked at the newspaper. My grandpa was an accountant. So whom could you encourage to be a pastor? You never know, they might end up being the one holding your hand and reading the Lord is my Shepherd as you lay on a hospital bed! When you go home today, would you and your family pray with me that God would send out more pastors into the world?

And as you do that, just be aware of one thing. God often uses us to answer our own prayers. He told his disciples to pray for more workers in his harvest field. And how did Jesus answer that prayer? He sent out his twelve disciples into his harvest field! You don't have to be a pastor to tell another person that Jesus cares for them. Our world is full of hurting people. This church, right at this moment, is full of hurting people. Hurting people who need Jesus! That person sitting next to you isn't just a blank stare. It's someone who needs to know today—and everyday—that Jesus cares for her. God has given you a heart to love others. He has filled up your heart with his compassion for you. Now "*freely you have received, freely give.*" Jesus cares!

Matthew 9:35-10:8
Rev. Nathan Nass

Pentecost 4
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³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, preach this message: "The kingdom of heaven is near." ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Jesus Cares

Do you ever wonder how you look from up here in front of church? I'll tell you. As I stand up here in front of you during church, you usually look like you're bored out of your minds. I have to admit that one of the hardest things for me as I was learning to preach was realizing that most people as they listen in church have blank stares on their faces. Just look around you sometime during a sermon! And so I keep reminding myself that what I see on your faces isn't the whole story. Some of you really are bored, and I apologize for that. But there is so much more going on that you are carrying inside and I can't see.

So I wonder what Jesus would see if he stood up here and looked out at you. Jesus knows us as we really are. Jesus can see right past whatever expression we put on our faces. What does Jesus see in us? Today we find out. Matthew tells us that "*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*" When Jesus looked out at the crowds gathered around him, he saw past the looks on their faces to what was really in their hearts. And this what he saw: "*They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*"

"*Harassed and helpless.*" I don't know about you, but I think those are good words to describe life. When I hear the word "harassed," I think of all the gnats and mosquitoes

flying all around. They just don't leave you alone. No matter where you go. When you go outside today, you will be harassed! And if it were just gnats and mosquitoes, it'd be one thing. But those are really the least of our concerns. What's harassing you today? Arthritis that won't stop. Depression that refuses to lift. Grief that doesn't go away. Loneliness even in a group of people. Frustration. Disappointment. Guilt. Us, harassed? Doesn't it feel like things are flying at you left and right?

And it's bad enough to have trouble after trouble buzzing around our face. But what makes every single one of those troubles worse is feeling like there is nothing you can do to make things better. "*Helpless*," Jesus says. I can't stand feeling helpless! You've tried everything you can and it still doesn't work. You've listened to all the advice and nothing has changed. So you don't know what else to do. There is no feeling we human beings hate more than feeling helpless! I think Jesus picked the right words to describe life. He saw those people and he sees us just as we really are—"*harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd*."

So what did Jesus do? Did he turn right around and look for some better people? When he saw the crowds, did he put on his sunglasses, pull his hat down over his eyes, and rush to his donkey limo as fast as he could? No. "*He had compassion on them*." Friends, Jesus cares! Deeply. He looked out at people he had never met, people who were terribly confused about him and about life. And Jesus cared for them so deeply that he could really feel it inside. His big heart went out to them. To every single one of them. If you find yourself struggling to find someone who really, truly cares about you and everything that is going on in your life, you can know that Jesus cares!

And as your pastor, I'd like to stand up here and say that's exactly how I feel about all of you. But you're a lot smarter than that. You'd know I would be lying. There isn't any other person who can come even close to caring like Jesus cares. It certainly isn't me, and I bet it isn't you either. In fact, I'm afraid the more troubles we see in our lives, the more we become numb to the sufferings of the people around us. We get so preoccupied with our own struggles, what we're facing, that we become numb to what other people—even people very close to us—are suffering.

Do you understand what I mean when I say numb? It really is sad! I had a friend in college who married young, and during her time in college she had a miscarriage. Someone brought up the miscarriage in one of our classes, and I can remember the professor saying, "Oh, that happens a lot. She'll be alright." Numb. I had another friend who was struggling with depression. And when he went home for Christmas break his dad told him, "Everybody has down days. I don't want to hear you complain about it anymore." Numb. Tens of thousands of poor children show up on our country's border, bombs kill dozens in other countries, and we just turn the channel. Numb. It's sad, isn't it? We can hear of the

greatest tragedies, and how do we respond? Numb.

And that's not even the worst of it. The worst kind of numbness is not when we lack compassion for someone's physical needs, it's when we're unconcerned for their souls. I sat in a man's living room this week and heard him tell me that there is no God and that we need to just live for the moment, because no one knows what happens when you die. As I sat there, I was praying to God that he would help me feel for that man. He doesn't have Jesus. If he were to die tonight, he would be in hell. But do I care? Do you care? Brothers and sisters, it is a bad thing how our preoccupation with our own troubles makes us numb to the struggles of the people all around us.

But not Jesus. Jesus cares! Jesus of all people knows what it is like to suffer. Yet there is not one bit of numbness in Jesus' heart. When Jesus sees us as we really are—*harassed and helpless*, instead of walking away from us, he steps closer. Because no matter what your burden is today, Jesus has compassion on you. He feels for you right here. No matter how other people treat you, Jesus cares! He cares about your arthritis, your depression, your loneliness, your addiction—that's why he went around healing every disease. He cares about your soul. He wants you to be sure of your salvation—that's why he preached to all about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus cares!

And Jesus doesn't just say it, he showed it. Just in this chapter of Matthew, he told a paralyzed man, "*Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven...Get up, take your mat and go home*." He ate with "sinners" and declared, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick*." He healed an old woman who had been bleeding for years. He took a dead girl by the hand and she got up. He touched two blind men's eyes, they opened. And you know where that compassion led Jesus—to a cross where he died for you and me. So there's no more guilt. No more shame. Friends, I can't see exactly what you're struggling with today, but I can guarantee this: Jesus cares!

And because he cares so much for us, this is what he does—he sends pastors into the world. When he saw these harassed and helpless people, Jesus said, "*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field*." Now you can be honest. Maybe you're thinking, "Is that the best you could do, Jesus? Send out some pastors? Really? They're going to solve the world's problems?" Yes! But only because this is what a pastor's job is: To remind you that Jesus cares for you. That Jesus died to forgive you and give you life in heaven. That's the answer. Jesus cares! And Jesus wants you to be reminded of that often!

Because every single day the devil tries very hard to make us forget that. He gets you to have an argument with your spouse. He makes work frustrating. And at the end of the day he makes you feel bad for your sin. And then the next day he does it all again. Over