

CONSIDER THE PEOPLE

Matthew 9:36

INTRODUCTION:

There are many ways to look at people.

- Some see people as opportunities to be exploited. It seems that after any natural disaster, there are opportunists that sweep in and compound the misery of the victims by taking advantage of them when they are vulnerable. We often hear about the unscrupulous who prey on the elderly. Some exploit children; some exploit women; some exploit the lonely or the disadvantaged. Some people live as predators and they see people as opportunities to be exploited.
- Some see people as a market to be tapped. They run the demographics and plot their strategy so they can pitch their product or sell their service to as many customers in their target group as they possible can.
- Some see people as bundles of potential to be developed; while others see them as bundles of trouble to be avoided.
- But our text for this morning tells us that when Jesus looked on the crowds, he saw them *“like sheep without a shepherd”*.

³⁶ *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

Sheep need a shepherd. They need a shepherd to lead them and to feed them. They need a shepherd to correct them and protect them. They need a shepherd to tend and defend them. And absent a shepherd, sheep will be harassed and helpless: exactly the words Matthew used in his description of what Jesus saw when he looked at the people

Jesus was unwilling to merely see harassed and helpless people. He was unwilling to simply see them wandering, used, abused and misused for the lack of a shepherd. His great heart demanded that he do something to save them. In our text, we see how he responded to what he saw in the people he met.

I. THE PROCEDURE HE FOLLOWED (9:35)

Matthew 4:23 says that *“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”*

So, according to that text, one of Jesus’ methods of evangelism was teaching in their synagogues. “Teacher” or “Rabbi” is the most frequent expression for the work and activity of Jesus. Jesus frequently taught in the synagogues of the villages where he went. During synagogue meetings, visiting teachers (rabbis) were often invited to expound on

scripture. That is, they were asked to read the Scriptures and then apply the Word of God to the lives of the people to show them how it fits.

In addition to teaching in the synagogues, Jesus seized upon spontaneous teachable moments. He taught in the fields, he taught on the hillside, he taught at the lakeside, he taught from the bow of a boat. Everywhere he went, he looked for opportunities and teachable moments.

Jesus was the master-teacher, who, through the use of parables, metaphors and other teaching techniques, took familiar passages and showed the people how they could be put into practice in their lives.

Jesus' ministry was also preaching the good news of the Kingdom. The "herald" was an envoy who was sent to proclaim a message from the king for his people. His responsibility was to tell what he's been told *exactly* and *unequivocally*. That was Jesus' mission, too. And it is the job of every disciple of Jesus. It is not our job to change the truth, shade the truth or hide the truth. It *is* our job to tell the truth from Scripture.

According to Matthew 4:23, Jesus' work in Galilee also involved "healing every disease and sickness". The term used for sickness refers to chronic or serious illness while the term used for disease means the occasional or less serious illness. Jesus' healing ministry was applied to all kinds of illnesses.

Now the point is that during his ministry on this earth, Jesus gave attention to practical needs: the big ones and the little ones and he expects us to do the same.

Hymn 724 in our hymnal is LEAD ON, O KING ETERNAL. The second verse reads:

*Lead on, O King eternal, Till sins fierce war shall cease,
And holiness shall whisper The sweet Amen of peace;
For not with swords loud clashing, Nor roll of stirring drums;
With deeds of love and mercy, The heav'nly kingdom comes.*

A healer's job is to administer deeds of love and mercy to the lives of people who need it. The church, as the body of Christ on earth today, is charged with continuing the ministry that Jesus began: teaching, preaching and providing physical ministry to the people of the earth.

II. THE PASSION HE FELT (9:36)

There is a song that was in our previous hymnbook that, regrettably is not in our current hymnal. But I pray it is still in our hearts:

*Give me a passion for souls, dear Lord. A passion to save the lost;
Help me to throw out the old lifeline And help them at any cost.*

*Jesus, I long, I long to be winning
Men who are lost and constantly sinning;
O may this hour be one of beginning
The story of pardon to tell.*

That old song goes on to ask “*How shall this passion for souls be mine? Lord, make the answer clear.*”

Well, the answer is clear from this text: by seeing the people the way Jesus did. When Jesus looked at the people, he saw the victims. Those were the ones who were harassed, under attack, plundered, exhausted, distressed. They were helpless, beaten down and defeated.

But when Jesus looked at the people, he also saw the victimizers. He saw the scribes, the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law: the religious establishment. In Romans 2:24, Paul said that God’s name was blasphemed among the *non-religious* because of the behaviors of the *religious* people. Jesus looked at the people and he saw that.

As a result of Jesus’ vision of the people, he had compassion on them

So, what about you? How do you see our people? When you look at the faces of the people who pass, what do you see?

Imagine a tightrope walker about to cross Niagara Falls. Just before he begins, suppose he receives a message that the cable is not really secure at the other end. And then suppose the messenger adds, “By the way, it’s not really very secure on this side, either. But have a nice walk.” That entertainer would be an idiot to take one step!

But that is exactly the kind of risk we expect from people today. They are told, “We don’t know where you are going when you die, and we don’t exactly know where you come from, but have a good life! Don’t do drugs, don’t get involved in promiscuous sex, and don’t drink and drive.” No wonder they disregard that counsel. With no sense of identity and no sense of destiny, the only reasonable conclusion is instant self-gratification. “Eat, drink and make it with Mary” makes sense to a generation separated from God.

How do you look at the people of our state? The state of Illinois has about 11.5 million people. According to religious sociologist, Dr. Win Arn, 44.7% have no affiliation with any church. That is over 5 million people in our state alone. And that is in addition to the 3 million people who claim an affiliation to some church but do not attend. That means that, in the state of Illinois, there are over 8 million people who have

never accepted Christ as Savior or who have no living and vital relationship with his Body, the church.

Clay City has a population of 1000 (according to the highway sign). We have five churches in our town. From what I have learned from the ministers in our Ministerial Alliance, on any given Sunday, among our 5 churches, there are less than 350 people in church. Now, I know that there are some from Clay City who go other places to church. But there are also many who attend church in Clay City who do not live within the city limits. So it would probably about balance out to say that probably 65% of the people in our community will not be in the Lord's House, among the Lord's People on the Lord's Day. That is over 650 of our neighbors, friends and family. How do you view them? Do you see them in need of a Savior? Do you believe we have good news for them?

III. THE PRAYER HE FAVORED (9:36)

Scripture only records one prayer that Jesus asked us to pray. He asked us to pray that the Lord of the Harvest would send laborers into the fields.

I want you to consider the potential harvest. Surveys by the Barna Research Institute show that among Americans who do not go to church, the vast majority believe in the resurrection of Jesus, believe that Jesus is the Son of God and want their children to receive religious instruction. The same research shows that, among those who DO go to church, the #1 reason they gave for why they started was: *"invited by a friend"*. And, catch this: 52% of those who do not currently go to church say they believe they would if they were invited by a friend.

So consider this: how many of your friends would come to church if you only invited them.

You see, there is a critical shortage of workers. And I am not just talking about a need for preachers or youth ministers or missionaries or other paid staff. I mean, we desperately need people of all ages and every profession who will tell others that God will forgive their sins because Jesus died for them. Someone has put it this way: *"I'm just a nobody telling everybody about Somebody who will save anybody."*

Will you pray for God to send messengers with the message? Will you be a messenger with the message?

For forty years, Bob Russell preached at the Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY. He led that church through growth from an

average attendance of 120 each week to over 18,000. People would ask Bob how big he wanted that church to grow. Russell has written:

As long as there is one person in the community who does not have the promise of eternal life through Christ, the church should want to increase it's number by one. If you discovered a cure for AIDS and someone asked you how many people you want to receive this cure, you would answer "everyone who is infected with the AIDS virus. I want it to benefit everyone who needs it." When people think of the church as their personal club, they misunderstand the purpose of the church. Our primary task is to make disciples of those who don't know Christ. And we must not rest as long as there is one who does not know him as savior and lord!

CONCLUSION:

The need that Jesus met in his generation is a need for our generation, too. What will we do about the harassed and helpless sheep? What are we going to do about the white fields that need to be harvested?

*Give us a watchword for the hour
A thrilling word, a word of power;
A battle-cry, a flaming breath,
That calls us to conquest or to death;
A word to rouse the church from rest,
To heed her Master's high behest,
The call is given: Ye hosts arise,
Our watchword is "Evangelize!"*

*The glad evangel now proclaim
Through all the earth in Jesus' Name;
This word is ringing through the skies,
Evangelize! Evangelize!*

*To dying men, a fallen race,
Make known the gift of gospel grace;
The world that now in darkness lies,
Evangelize! Evangelize!*

-- Henry Crocker

INVITATION: #661 – "Little Is Much When God Is In It"