

June 14 2026 9am & 11 am Romans 5:1-8 Matthew 9:35-10:8

One phrase stood out for me when I first read today's gospel: *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed & helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

That's Matt 9:36 and I probably related to it because I was trying to sort out some domestic problem using a computer helpline and there was only an AI assistant to talk to!

Of course that's a trivial first-world example: & there are many bigger reasons for people to feel insecure & alone: cost of living, accommodation worries, health concerns, work problems ...

... involving unhelpful or unsympathetic authority figures

It was probably even worse for the crowds Jesus mixed with. They were living in an occupied country, ruled by a foreign power with no real concern for their well being

And tougher still than that would be living in an actual war zone or in the midst of plague or famine, or being a refugee from some such place and looking for shelter

But the main thing to notice is that when Jesus saw people struggling he *had compassion for them*

And because Jesus has compassion for human struggles we know that God also has compassion because Jesus *does nothing by Himself but only what He sees his Father doing* (John 5:19)

So, whenever we're confused or hopeless, we need to remember that God is not impatient with us.

God doesn't shrug and say it's our own fault (even though it often is). *He has compassion.*

That's important point number one.

How does Jesus show his compassion? Matt 9:35 says that he healed diseases and cast out demons (which perhaps meant healing mental or psychological illnesses)

And those miraculous actions show that Jesus is someone whose compassion doesn't just stop at sympathy. His compassion goes along with the power to make a difference.

But also notice this: in his humanity Jesus could only be in one place at a time so he tells his disciples to pray for more people power – ask God to *send out more labourers into the harvest* (Matt 9:38)

Then pretty soon Jesus calls his disciples to be part of the answer to their own prayer!

In Matt 10:1,5,7, he gives them the power & authority to do the same works that he's been doing and sends them out to various towns and villages to get on with it. This raises important point 2:...

... praying more labourers into the harvest hasn't been my usual response to the world's troubles.

I often just pray for God to bring relief without mentioning the human element.

And I often overlook the possibility that I might be called to be one of the labourers!

And there's also an Important point 3: Do we take seriously the idea that God gives exceptional powers to those called to be labourers in God's harvest among the harassed and helpless?

Or do we just skirt around that possibility because it's scary and too hard to believe?

Now it's easy to focus on the visible acts of healing and deliverance that Jesus does ...

... but there's something *else* he does too (Matt 9:35): *proclaiming the good news of the kingdom*

And when the disciples go out they also preach *the kingdom of heaven has come near* (Matt 10:7)

Now when Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God I think he wants us to picture a situation where everything is governed by the love and righteousness of God. Perhaps we can say the kingdom of God is being in the state of loving (& being loved by) God and of loving our neighbours as ourselves. (Maybe over-simplified but I believe there's enough truth in that for us to think about now)

And here's the thing that's important point number 4:

The problems that rouse Jesus's compassion aren't just the individual illnesses ...

... they're the sickness and broken relationships within all humanity

The physical healings, wonderful as they are, are not, by themselves, going to change that. These healings are a sign that God is present & active in the world through Jesus and His followers. Jesus says we should believe his words simply because God is speaking & working through him. But if the words alone don't convince us then Jesus says *believe me because of the works themselves*. (That's John 14:11, words spoken at the Last Supper)

Because Jesus heals physical, mental, emotional disorders he wants us to believe he will do the much bigger work of healing our state of being *harassed & helpless, like sheep without a shepherd* And in John 10 Jesus promises to do just that: to be a shepherd – a really *good* one – who will lead us safely through dangers & will risk his own life to keep us safe and bring us home to God the Father. Even bigger than that, John chapter 1 tells us that *to all who received him, who believed in his name, [Jesus] gave power to become children of God* That's a total transformation from being a lost sheep!

It's gospel promises like that which lie behind what Paul says to the Romans in today's other reading. But when Paul is writing this letter, the gospels haven't yet been written! So he's drawing on all the memories circulating among Jesus's followers about what he told his disciples before & after his resurrection. And of course he's being prompted by the Holy Spirit too.

Paul wants us to understand – and really grasp the wonder of it – that Jesus has shepherded us to a place of being at peace with God. (Rom 5:1)

This is a relationship with God that we didn't earn or negotiate for ourselves! (Rom 5:2)

It has happened through the death and resurrection of Jesus – the shepherd laying down his life

This may be hard to understand; but for now Paul wants us just to believe it & hold on to it – ...

... even in the midst of any harassment (& the temptation to hopelessness) that's still all around us

And as we hold on, the Holy Spirit will grow the fruit of patience, faithfulness & self-control in us ...

... to enable us to walk hopefully into whatever glorious things God has in store for us ... (Rom 5:2-5)

And I don't believe that those glorious things are just to do with "going to heaven when we die" ...

... they are also to do with work that God has for us in this life

Our new, healed relationship with God may begin with belief in our head; but it also carries a hope that we'll see the glory of God in a world where harassments still afflict us & those around us.

We can hope that our love relationship with God will also grow as a love relationship in the world ...

... as God calls *us* to be labourers in the harvest of people who are yet to know Jesus & trust him

So let's believe that God wants us to work in that harvest and to be willing to find out and follow whatever that means.

Now some of us may worry that if God sends us out to work in new & unfamiliar places then we'll somehow take a wrong turning or say the wrong thing - and then we'll lose our peace with God . But that's not how it works!

In Rom 5:6-8 Paul reminds us that Jesus came into the world and died for the sake of people who were *not yet* in a peaceful relationship with God; ...

... so why would God ever want to break a peaceful relationship *once it's actually started* and is growing and developing. So here's important point 5

Once we're at peace with God, staying at peace doesn't depend on *us* getting everything right!

It's Jesus who enabled that peace : so we can trust Jesus to sustain it as long as we want him to

And now we're back with a picture we've looked at a lot over the last months: Jesus the Vine supporting us the branches as the Gardener works lovingly to make us more fruitful

So, starting from this morning, can we believe it and live in it a bit more?

Results of Justification

5 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have obtained access^[b] to this grace in which we stand; and we^[c] boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.³ And not only that, but we^[d] also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Matthew 9:35-10:8

The Harvest Is Great, the Labourers Few

³⁵Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for 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 labourers are few;³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

The Twelve Apostles

10 Then Jesus^[a] summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as 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;^[b]⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

The Mission of the Twelve

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans,⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near."^[a]⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers,^[d] cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.