

Matthew 9:37 – 38

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

Text: Matthew 9:37-38

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; there-fore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest."

Dear friends in Christ,

Back in the 70s when I was working in Pt Lincoln, SA, I met a retired Lutheran pastor by the name of Pastor (Ps) Harold Freund. He was relieving the local pastor who was on Long Service Leave. Ps Freund told me he graduated from seminary in the mid-1930s. At the time, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (ELCA) was planning to send missionaries to PNG. As it happened, the Neuendettelsau Missionary Society offered to sell their mission situated on the Rooke-Siassi Islands and the ELCA took up the offer.

This is how a young, graduate pastor became a missionary in PNG and served there for nearly 40 years. Now, Ps Freund wasn't the first missionary in the world nor was he the last. Instead, he was part of a long line of missionaries and evangelists that go right back to the Apostles (including Paul) who were called by Jesus, our Good Shepherd, to "*go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" (Matt. 28:19-20)

Now, earlier in Matthew's Gospel, we have a clue why the world needs missionaries and evangelists: '*When [Jesus] saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless – like sheep without a shepherd.*' (Matt. 9:36)

As you may know, sheep don't obey commands very well. When a flock is driven some will refuse to go through the gates, whereas a whole mob will follow a leader anywhere. Go and figure! Also, sheep are fairly placid animals and unable to defend themselves against predators like foxes and wild dogs. And like farmed animals, they have no other purpose in life than to provide us with wool, meat, and hides.

My friends, try to imagine how miserable it would be if all we could look forward to in life was to eat, procreate, and then be slaughtered for someone else's economic gain?

Unlike animals, however, by the time we are teenagers we begin to sense that 'some-thing' is missing in our lives and searching for it high and low. It can take some time and effort to discover what this 'something' is – so some just follow the crowd. Now, some believe they've discovered meaning for their lives, and live according to their new-found philosophy. Whereas others search and search but find nothing that will truly satisfy their needs.

Sadly, however, if we look deep inside ourselves all we discover is darkness and an emptiness. Instead of wholeness and integrity, we find weakness and imperfection, and a sense of separation from God. But what the world offers just cannot satisfy our yearning for that wholeness and connectedness with the divine.

But, my friends, Jesus – the Word who was with God and is God – knows what is the meaning of life because He was there when God breathed life into Adam. Indeed, He knows the deep love that God had for Adam and Eve – the pinnacle of His creation.

Jesus also knows the perfect relationship that came from that love; and that our first parents ruined their relationship by disobeying God's will. He also knows that no-one – no matter how conscientious and hardworking they are – could ever discover a way to restore that broken relationship. It's like climbing a greasy pole.

And, my friends, that's why the Word became flesh. Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, became true man so He could take our place under God's law and fulfil it perfectly. In fact, He became the target of God's wrath against our sin, suffering and dying on the cross in our stead.

By His sacrifice, Jesus redeemed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. And having risen from the dead, Jesus can proclaim our sins forgiven and our relationship with God restored. More than that, Jesus restored for us the meaning of life; and assures us that we will rise on the last day to live in the Father's house forever.

Now, as Jesus looked over the crowds wandering aimlessly like lost sheep, He saw that future generations would also be searching for meaning. So our Lord passed His own mission to the Twelve, teaching them the true meaning of life: "*For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" (Jn. 3:16)

Indeed, my friends, more people are needed to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ to lost souls. But we need not send missionaries overseas because there are many, many people in our own communities who are wandering aimlessly, feeling harassed and helpless. Just look around your neighbourhood...even at your family and friends. They, too, need to find true and lasting meaning for their lives.

Yes, I know that's a scary proposition. But do not be afraid for, as Jesus promised, "*...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My [Jesus'] name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you.*" (John 14:26) So let us pray eagerly to the Lord of the harvest "*to send out workers into His harvest field*" so children, young adults, the middle-aged, and seniors in the community can find true meaning for their lives in Christ Jesus – their Lord and Redeemer. **Amen.**"

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor Ernie Kiss
14 June 2020