

## ***REMEMBERING INJUSTICE, WORKING FOR JUSTICE***

### ***Wanted: Laborers for the Harvest***

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Matthew 9:35 - 10:8

May the peace of Christ be with you all as we gather in worship on this the Lord's Day.

A college professor asked his class a question. "If Philadelphia is 100 miles from New York and Chicago is 1,000 miles from Philadelphia and Los Angeles is 2,000 miles from Chicago, how old am I?"

The class was silent. Finally one student in the back of the class raised his hand when called upon said, "Professor, you are 44."

The Professor said, "You are absolutely correct, but tell me, how did you arrived at the answer so quickly?"

The student said, "Well you see, Professor, I have a brother back home, he is 22, and he's only half crazy."

We are living in a crazy, confused and mixed up world today where so many people are living like sheep without a shepherd. They are lost and have wandered off into pastures where they are feeding on the grass of racism, prejudice, and hatred. I believe when our Lord looks at the state of affairs in our world, our nation, and our communities today; when he looks at how we are divided along lines of race, class, gender, and even religion; there is no doubt that he looks at us as he once looked at the lost sheep of Israel, with a heart of compassion.

Today's New Testament passage from Matthew 9:35-10:8 describes the scene for us as Jesus went from town to town and from village to village, going into synagogues preaching the good news of redemption, salvation, and the love of God. Those with diseased bodies were brought to him and they were healed. Those with bruised and hurt lives were brought to him and they also were healed. Those who needed a new orientation on their social and political outlook after coming into his presence went away with changed attitudes.

That is what Jesus is able to do for a person, a community, and even a nation. He is in the life changing business and no one who ever came into his presence seeking the living water ever went away thirsty. As theologian Emil Brunner put it some years ago, after one has had that "I – Thou" encounter something happens on the inside that changes the way we act on the outside. I read where one Bible commentator said that as a people we are standing at the crossroads looking for direction. However, the signs have been taken down. And so, it is the job of the church to be a herald for Christ who alone through the power of the Holy Spirit can convict, convert, and set one free from the sin that can shackle the spirit and the mind.

When Jesus walked the face of this earth he did all he could to reach out to people in need wherever he found them. But he was limited in what he alone could do. Jesus looked out and saw the great masses and the great needs of broken humanity. They were like sheep without a shepherd. He had compassion on them. This word compassion in the Greek implies "pain of love." It describes the compassion which moves a person to the deepest depth of his or her being. Jesus was moved to compassion by the world's pain. He was moved with compassion for the sick in body, mind, and spirit. This compassion of Jesus saw people not as "cases" or "underprivileged" or "unfortunate" but he saw people as people who were created in the image of God.

This month we remember those nine saints of God whose lives were tragically ended two years ago by the bullets of a white racist, as together they engaged in prayer at the conclusion of a Bible study session in the basement of Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston. Our Lord looked at that situation and at all the pain and suffering that was to follow with compassion. I am also sure that he looked at it

with a heart of sorrow even as he looked at the city of Jerusalem just prior to his crucifixion. He wept then because the people stoned the prophets who had come to point them to the way of God, to the way of love and not hate, and the way of justice and mercy.

And even so, as our Lord looks over America today he still sees too many lives like that of Dylan Roof, lives that are confused and aimless. What a huge harvest!

As Jesus stood with his disciples and looked at the great needs of broken humanity he said as translated by Eugene H. Peterson in the Message, "What a huge harvest! How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands." And then Jesus called the twelve disciples and appointed them as the laborers, giving them authority to cast out unclean spirits, to cure disease and sickness of every kind. The Twelve were now an extension of the ministry of Christ.

The church is an extension of the ministry of Christ. As Jesus sent the Twelve he has also sent us "to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind' (Luke 4:18). Racism is a sickness that kills the soul of the hater and can bring hurt and pain to the victims of racism. It makes one a captive of hate and blind to the truth that God made of one blood all people who live on the planet earth. Laborers are needed today to speak truth to power, to confront racism and injustice and call it out for what it is. The church cannot and should not be silent in this age where racists are now dusting off the vocabulary of hate and bigotry. Today hate and bigotry is even permeating our elementary and high schools and so many of our children are being intimidated and living in fear. We must proclaim, however, that the devil is a liar; that truth will win over falsehood; that good will win over wrong; that God will win over Satan; and the Cross is our guarantee of victory over everything that tries to defeat the plan of God that his "kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

As we labor to bring in the harvest for Christ we let us proclaim with boldness the gospel of love which is able to redeem even the worst sinner.