

We bow our hearts in prayer: Heavenly Father, **Thy kingdom come...** to us and to Your creation, **For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.** Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our text for meditation today is the occasion that Jesus first sent out the 12 Disciples.

The verses immediately preceding our text give us the background for Jesus' words.

**And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages,
teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom
and healing every disease and every affliction.**

**When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them,
because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** vss.35-36

Up until this time, Jesus alone had been **teaching... proclaiming the Gospel... and healing...**

But this work was never meant to be Jesus' task alone.

He had been teaching and training 12 men who would also **teach and proclaim the Gospel,** the good news, **of the kingdom:** that it was **at hand,** that it was near them.

Our text for meditation today is...

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Then [Jesus] said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

And He called to Him His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'^(ESV)

These are Your Words, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

The crowds came to Jesus, they flocked to Him, looking for a Good Shepherd.

Their faithless teachers harassed them with the obligations of the **tradition of men.** Mark7:8

Their sheep-skinned-wolves fleeced and **devoured** them for personal gain. Ezekiel22:25 Matthew23:4

Their false shepherds **tied burdens** on them that **they were not willing to move with 1 finger.**

All the while, they **left, rejected,** and **made void** the **commandments and Word of God.**

Mark7:8,9,13

Where the Law of God certainly did command perfect obedience and severely condemned sin, God also made the provisions in that same Law to atone for sin and redeem the sinner.

The **righteous Zachariah, Elizabeth** Luke1:6, **Simeon** 2:25, and **Joseph of Arimathia** 23:50 weren't so because they were perfect, but because they were declared righteous by the Law,

through the sacrifices of the temple and their faithful participation in them.

They believed the Word when it condemned them, as well as when it forgave them. Matt.26

They sought the Lord's promised One, the Christ who would **shepherd God's people, Israel.**

But where the multitudes had been led astray by their false teachers,

they wandered... they fled... they were scattered Ezekiel34:12 ... they were lost.

They were helpless to find their own way back to God. They were shepherdless sheep.

And at the same time, they were ripe for the harvest.

Though they were brought to such helplessness & driven to hopelessness in their own works by their evil and wicked teachings and teachers, God turned that evil for good.

They were longing for and seeking comfort from their sins and when Jesus taught them about God's kingdom of grace from God's Word, they sought Him out.

This is why we hear so often in Scripture that "sinners and tax collectors" listened to Jesus. It isn't that Jesus ignored or treated their sins lightly.

It's that He answered their sins with God's plan of salvation, with atonement & forgiveness.

The **kingdom of heaven** was **at hand**. The Gate to paradise was once again open to them.

God's grace through the Savior was being spoken and imparted to them.

The fields were ripe. The multitudes sought comfort, and Jesus had compassion on them.

No longer would He alone purely proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, but now He would send out His readied Disciples as well.

God's Word would be preached, not just by 1 Man now, but 1 + 12.

This was always how it was to be.

Jesus took disciples to Himself from the beginning of His public ministry, so that they would spread the Word that He was **at hand** to forgive.

And they would continue to preach that Word to the world after Jesus had died, risen and ascended.

In fact, that would be the content of their preaching and teaching.

They were to be eye witnesses of His truly righteous life.

They were to testify that Jesus really had died (crucified and pierced), and was buried.

They were to verify that His body was no longer in the tomb,

that He had risen and had spoken to them and returned to His heavenly Father.

And the reason for all this was so that the world could know that God had sent His Savior, *"for us men and for our salvation."*^{Nicene Creed}

Read the book of Acts. See how the kingdom of God was extended: by Baptism and teaching.

And take note of the sermons preached by the Apostles.

Though the record in the book is only a summary of what they preached,

you always hear them preach Jesus crucified... crucified by them and for their sins, and crucified for them and for the atonement of their sins.

And they always preached Him risen from the dead,

having conquered death, and sin, and hell.

Through such preaching, the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

Jesus was there, through and in that Word,

to forgive and comfort the harassed/helpless heart.

Some might consider this text an opportunity to burden the conscience of the sheep for not being shepherds;

to feel guilty if you don't proclaim to everyone you know or meet that Jesus is at hand.

But notice that Jesus didn't say this is the responsibility of everyone in the Church.

Instead He numbers only 12 men in our text, men who have been specifically called by Him, men who have been taught and trained by Him in what to teach and proclaim.

Instead He gives the Church a different responsibility: the task to **pray earnestly...**

to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

The task was just as urgent in Jesus' day as it is in ours.

The harvest was plentiful, but the laborers were few in Jesus' day – about 13.

Yet Jesus did not send out every man, woman, and child that followed after Him.

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few still today, even with 10,000s of pastors.

And yet, it is not our job to worry about how the **Lord of the harvest** will find enough men to **send out** as His **laborers**, or who those specific laborers will be.

Even now, as we here at Parkland contemplate potentially calling another pastor, we are not to worry, but to **pray**... and all the more earnestly as we would desire such a pastor to shepherd, not only the flock here, but also and especially the lambs in the classroom.

Nor are we to worry about what such a pastor might be like.

While it is certainly wise for us to assess our needs and the diverse gifts that various pastors may have, if the Lord desires to have another pastor here, He will call and place the correct man, whoever and however He might be.

Should we be saddened if He sends us a relatively unknown **Thaddeus** instead of a **John**?

Or what if He were to replace a rock-solid St. **Peter** with a "Doubting **Thomas**"?

(Remember that even Peter fell.)

What if He gives us a former **Zealot** or **tax collector**?

With whom might He replace a didactic **Matthew**?

Perhaps with a **Bartholomew, in whom is found no deceit.** ^{John1:47}

Would we begrudge the **Lord of the harvest** His choice of whom to send into this labor?

We pray earnestly then for forgiveness on account of our worry.

And now receive Jesus' Son as crucified as your atonement, for the Father has.

Your sins are forgiven. You, like Zachariah and Elizabeth and Simeon, are declared righteous, for Jesus is risen for our justification.

And so **pray earnestly** and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, trust Him who by grace has helped us hitherto, who loves us and always seeks our eternal good.

We **pray earnestly** that if we are to receive another pastor, that He send us, not a Judas whose greed would lead him to betray the Lord and His Church, but a true shepherd, a pastor who has Jesus' compassion for the lost.

Who would extend the kingdom of heaven, opening up the pages of Scripture to us, bringing the kingdom near to us through the proper administration of the sacraments, and faithfully preaching and teaching what Jesus taught His Disciples to teach: Christ crucified and risen for our salvation.

The fields are ripe, not only here in Parkland, but throughout the world.

The crowds, the multitudes, are in need of *peace which the world cannot give,* ^{Collect of Peace ELHp.126} even in the place from which the Lord might call a pastor.

We pray the Lord of the harvest to keep and bring all His people within the fold and to lead us, by His true Word to the Gate of paradise, to His Son, Jesus Christ.

We pray:

Heavenly Father, **Thy kingdom come.** We know that it *certainly comes of itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also* and to the crowds of lost sheep around us.

*Gives us Your Holy Spirit, so that by Your grace we believe Your holy Word,
and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity. Amen.*

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

Soli Deo Gloria