**October 13th 2024 Twentieth Sunday after Trinity**

**Text: Matthew 9:35-38**  0741

**Theme: The Fields are White.**

May we all be a people of prayer, for our families, our congregation, our nation, and especially for the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear Christian people: The apostle Paul once described the people of God as weak, base, and as nothing. (1 Cor. 1:27f) It is a description which is accurate and justified. For the most part the Christian people are not the exceptional people of the earth. The enemies of God and of God’s people on the other hand are, for the most part the most influential, powerful, and exceptional people on earth at any given time. With rare exceptions the leaders in almost every industry and framework of society is made up of those who deny Christ, and in some cases of those who hate Christ and His Word. Their weapons against us are mighty. They have a monopoly on information, and so they are free to paint the conservative Christian in any light they please, with little or no challenge. They have at their disposal every government agency, every weapon known to man, and legions upon legions of faithful followers who will do their bidding. They have all the power, all the wealth, and all the strength. They could starve us out at their whim, they could litigate us into oblivion, they could, if they chose, annihilate us from the face of the earth. And who are we to stop them? Earthly speaking we would not stand a chance against them in any traditional contest. We are like ants to them, a nuisance maybe, but no more of a threat than a slight irritation. At least from the perspective of man this is the case.

And yet, here we are. The Christian faith has endured countless persecutions, attempted exterminations, hate, envy, scorn, and ridicule. It has stood against the most powerful. It has not broken even though every means of force has come against it. All the wealth could not stop it. All the strength could not destroy it. It remains, and even grows in the face of all that men can do unto it. Despite all their best efforts we are still here. Why is that the case? Should the Christian faith not have been wiped out by the Romans? Should the Roman Catholic Church have succeeded in destroying the Biblical faith? How has it continued to stand? In one word: prayer. Martin Luther attributed the success of the Reformation to the fervent and effectual prayer of righteous men! (Jms. 5:16) Hear these powerful words: *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Cor. 10:3-5)* Dear Christians, if we war after the flesh, with the carnal weapons available, we stand no chance at all. But if we war in the Spirit, warring on our knees as the people of the almighty God, we cannot be defeated. Now, as God’s people and according to faith, we desire to be a people of prayer. All too often, though, the business of life, the cares and distractions prevent us from getting on our knees and using the greatest weapon we have at our disposal. Maybe we pray only because we feel we have to, or we pray doubting the power of God, or we pray and think that it has done no good. However, when Scripture speaks of prayer, it is always urged as a powerful tool in the hand of a Christian, which can be used to conquer enemies, to overthrow the wicked one, to receive comfort, hope, and help in time of need. Looing at the condition of the world today, it is necessary that we return to our knees, dear Christians. That we become people who see the multitude and have compassion upon them, and pray that God would provide to us shepherds who lead in a godly way so that the people would return to the Lord and His Word shine forth throughout our land as a beacon, and all be brought unto the light. Let us learn today of prayer for the harvest that is white and ready. Let us do so according to our text for today which is found in the ninth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew beginning at verse thirty five.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray: O Lord, we must confess unto Thee that we have not come before Thee as often as we need; neither have our prayers been heartfelt and fervent before Thee; o forgive us our apathy, forgive us for our neglectfulness. We pray that Thou wouldst fill us this day with a full measure of Thy Spirit, giving us hearts which long to commune with Thee daily and receive our nourishment. Help us to see today the importance of the work of the ministry, and that fervent prayer is to made for the office, and for those who fill the office. Grant that we not think of it as frivolous or unnecessary, but to the very salvation of our souls; and knowing this that each man here assembled would ponder entering the ministry to care for the sheep of God. Show that we must needs pray for the office and for men to fill the office, for thereby is Thy Word preached and Thy sacraments administered to us, which is for the salvation of our souls. Help us to rightly hear the admonition of our Savior, and recognizing the time in which we live, to be urgent in our service to Thee and to work while it is day before the night comes when no man can work. Be with all Thy ministers, and through them do Thou preserve peace in the nation, comfort in our hearts, and hope in a better country, even our heavenly home. We ask all these things in Thy name and for Thy sake. Amen.

Guided then by God’s Spirit let us learn that the fields are white, for:

1. **The harvest is plenteous.** We read verses thirty five through thirty seven of our text: **read verses here.** The opening verse of our text is quite fascinating, presenting to us a simple glossary of Jesus’ activity, making rather routine statements to describe His activity. And yet think on what exactly is being described. He preached the Gospel in the synagogues, and healing disease and sickness among the people. These are no small things, but are of the greatest things seen in the world. The preaching of the Gospel, which thereby heals the soul is the greatest of these, but along with it comes compassion and pity for those who suffer and wander about in the world like sheep who have no shepherd. Why is there anything wrong with that? Wouldn’t the sheep be better off being free from a man who constantly watches their every movement? That is how the world and the flesh view having a leader, particularly a leader in the church. No flesh wants a minister, and no flesh wants to be a minister. Yet I tell each and every one of you: look around! Is the manner of our nation and the wicked acts of the world to be blessed by God? Is the condition of the world such that we have no need to be gathered at all times by a shepherd? Does no man here see the need of ministers? When Jesus speaks of the white harvest, that is an indication that there are souls which need harvested, that is, need to hear the Gospel, to repent, and be saved. Can we continue to ignore this? Can we continue to go day by day watching the masses sink deeper and deeper into the bondage of sin and death, and say: “There is nothing I can! While the souls of men are dying, and the Master calls for you.”? Jesus makes a statement, after He looks about the crowds and crowds of people who need His help and His Word, they need contrition, they need forgiveness of their sins, and the Holy Spirit, but this is just in the towns and cities surrounding Jerusalem. There is a whole world of people, stretched over generations who have this same need. I know the compassion, the pity, the heart wrenching feeling of looking at people and knowing their condition, their dreadful, damnable condition. They are diseased, wandering like sheep from one thing to the next, never considering the state of their own soul. I know this because I was once in that very state. I know what it is like to feel hopeless; to feel as if there is no meaning; to explore, and look; to search for something that will fill the void in your soul, only to find that each and every one is meaningless, and at the end of each of those roads is nothing but despair, finding yourself in a darker place, deeper in the pit and the cycle continues. How many people are here today? Now think on how many people are not. There are thousands and thousands of souls dying right at this moment. There are people who are searching; there are those that need comfort; they are looking for hope and help; but cannot find it. In Jesus’ words the fields are white unto the harvest. We are at a point right now, not five years away, not ten years away, but we are in the middle of watching a Sodom-like judgment of this nation and people. What can stop this? Is there anything that can be done? I say that there is, for with God all things are possible. The city of Nineveh repented at the preaching of one man, Jonah. Martin Luther declared unequivocally that the success of the reformation was prayer. I ask you now, are we a people of prayer? I can only speak for myself, but I can say that I have not urgently and fervently prayed as I should, or as I need.

What Jesus is here showing is great compassion upon sinners, sinners who need to heal, sinners who will eternally die without Him as their Great Shepherd, through the shepherds that He sends. This cannot be ignored. What was it that Jesus saw when He saw the crowds that elicited such a strong response? He saw the same thing that we see when and if we open our eyes. He saw thieves, harlots, murderers, adulterous men and women, and His heart broke for them. Yes indeed sin is sin, and sin will be punished in those who do not believe, but Jesus wanted to give them the gift of forgiveness and salvation. Since all people are these sinners then all people need this, and the harvest is plenteous. But as Jesus says:

1. **The laborers are few.** We read verses thirty seven and thirty eight of our text: **read verses here.** In centuries past, especially before the Reformation, that there was no shortage of ministers, but during those times is when being a minister was glamorized, and the men themselves revered and worshipped even. However the true nature of the ministry often causes there to be a shortage, because as the word minister actually says, it is to become a servant. From an earthly perspective there is no reason to become a good and faithful pastor. Teaching the whole counsel of God will not make you popular, it will make one wealthy, and it will not glorify the minister himself. These things are possible when a part or all of God’s truth is compromised, but being a true minister, a faithful minister necessarily entails sacrifice. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and so if one wanted to see what the ministry is to actually look like. Though He is the Son of God, He lived in humility, and He looked to do good for others, and did not gather to Himself. Now what is described is not meant to be an appeal to the flesh, but an appeal to pray for the good of God’s Church, and for the souls of men. To have compassion for them, to pity them in their state and to spend our hours and days working for the kingdom. They will truly be weary days and weary nights. A minister will be overwhelmed at times. Yet Jesus does not say that strong men should fill the office, and He does not say that only great men enter the ministry. Rather He says to pray. Pray that God provide men and equip them to perform the functions of the ministry. To make them able workers. To give them strength and knowledge to be able to perform the difficult task. As said before prayer is powerful, and one of the greatest things that we can pray for is that for which Jesus exhorts in our text, for laborers. There is a severe shortage of faithful ministers today and it seems that as the years pass there are fewer and fewer. May God give the Spirit to men to answer the call for more laborers. The apostle Paul once said this: *“For I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” (Phil. 2:20-21)* Martin Luther said again that he had too much to do that he had no choice but to spend two hours in prayer each and every day. We tend to think that the amount of things that need done would be hindered by spending some of our limited time in prayer, but the opposite is actually true. If we find ourselves to be inundated with the tasks of this ;life, it is most necessary to pause life, and engage in prayer with the Lord, so that He may strengthen us, give us wisdom, and comfort us for our day. Let us become a people of prayer, of fervent and sincere prayer, and therein to fight the good fight of faith. Let us heed the Lord’s call to pray for laborers in fields, to help harvest souls for the kingdom of God, for the Gospel they are sent with is to us eternal life. May God ever grant that we be His faithful people, and spend our days prayerfully and in faith, knowing that God hears and answers the prayers of those justified by the blood of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. May God grant us strong faith in Him as we face the last days in this present evil world, and may He return soon to take us all home to heaven. Amen.