

The Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 14, 2026
St. Michael's Church
The Rev. Joshua Wong
Gospel reading: Matthew 9:35-10:8(9-23)

Let us pray: “If you command me, Lord, to do what you did, give me your heart.”
Amen.
—St. John of Avila.

The prayer we just had together was from St. John of Avila. It speaks about God and our hearts joining as one. In today's Gospel, “Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

The purpose of the Pentecost season we are presently in, is a time for us to live out the Gospel in everyday moments. It's a time for spiritual growth, outreach to our community, and living the faith by service.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. What was your reaction when you heard this sentence read? Have you ever seen something that touched

you so much you became convicted? I know I am always moved when I see an abandoned or abused animal, or anyone abused. I am moved when our veterans don't have the healthcare they deserve, or when the elderly do not have adequate care for the last part of their lives.

What moves you to act?

Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, tells the story of a young Jewish woman named Etty Hillesum. Hillesum was in her twenties when the Nazis occupied Holland. At that time, she was not a conventionally religious person, but between the years of 1941 and 1943, as she watched her world descend into nightmare and chaos, she became deeply aware of God's hand on her life. Imprisoned in the transit camp at Westerbork, before being shipped to the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Etty wrote these words: "There must be someone to live through it all and bear witness to the fact that God lived, even in these times. And why should I not be that witness?"

Archbishop Williams describes Hillesum's commitment this way: Etty decided to occupy a certain place in the world, a place where others could somehow connect with God through her. She took responsibility for making God credible in the world. She took responsibility for God's believability. In Hillesum's spiritual journey, she proved that faith and love are resilient against the darkest of times.

Making God believable in the world. Taking responsibility for God's credibility. How do you react to these sentences? Does it occur to us that these phrases might describe our vocation as followers of Christ? Not just when belief is easy, but also when belief feels impossible?

In today's Gospel, Jesus saw the multitudes of "sheep without a shepherd," Jesus was deeply moved and tells his disciples, "Go." Go and proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Go and cure the sick, Go and raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. Go and touch. Go and heal. Go and resurrect. Go and make peace. Go and make God credible in people's lives.

Go and render believable the compassion of God. How do we render compassion to others, those we love and those we don't? It's difficult, but Jesus is our example of loving both people who accepted him and those who didn't, the little innocent children that embrace him, and those who spat at him.

Needless to say, this commissioning is for us as well. Then, after explaining to the disciples what their task is, Jesus offers them some appalling operating instructions: "I'm sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves, so be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. You will be dragged before governors. You will be handed over to councils and flogged. You will be hated by all because of my name."

Yes, the Gospels are confrontational. They warn us of the cost of being Jesus' disciples. In it, Jesus asks us to surrender absolutely everything we have and are, for the sake of making God credible to a world that's in pain and confusion. What Jesus is suggesting here is that there will be times when our faith will be demanding, it will require us to violate cultural norms, fight uphill battles, fight for the voiceless and powerless, and speak dangerous truths to power.

If we think that being a Christian means to secure our own comfort, then we cannot follow Jesus. Why? Because, discipleship will disorient and disrupt us. Being a disciple of Christ may make us the neighborhood weirdos. We might be the minority in our social circles, or in our social roles. It will shake things up in our families, our churches, and our communities. It will test our priorities, and our faith. It will definitely expose evils in the status quo we cling to. It will humble us. Because it means we have to stand up to truths we must face about ourselves!

Today's epistle to the Romans eloquently puts it this way: "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us." So often we try to skip straight to hope and hunker down in its promise. Yes, the Church is called to profess hope. But hope has no meaning if it's not undergirded by justice and sacrifice. Notice the order in this verse: suffering, endurance, character, and THEN hope.

Yesterday, we ordained five new deacons into our diocese. These five are heeding to Jesus' commandment to "Go." I have had the pleasure of meeting them in my role on the Commission on Ministry team. I heard their stories, their journey to the

Holy Order. Their vow is to make God believable in the world. They are taking on the responsibility for God's credibility. J.D, Drew, Kelly, Julia and Kaitlyn went through a lot of testing to be ordained. We will have the privilege to hear a few of their stories at our pulpit before they get ordained in January.

To make God believable in our world may require us to stand in the midst of our aching, weeping, and dying friend's lives. Making God credible means being living witnesses to our friends, family and neighbors.

We all have our unique sphere of influence. Don't underestimate the power you have as a spiritual influencer. Ask yourself, what makes the gospel relevant to them? Ask God how you can make God credible in their world? By your honesty, your moral choices, how you vote, what you stand for, how you are as a parent or a spouse, or a caregiver to your aging parents, or by your gentleness and kindness towards others?

Recently, I had the privilege of reconnecting with a past footwear design client. We managed to grab a cup of coffee and caught up with our lives. She, like many

were excited to learn about my vocational transition from being a footwear designer to becoming a priest. She was full of questions. The best question was, “Do you find your past life as a footwear designer trivial and meaningless compared to what you do now?” Later she admitted, “I am not surprised you became a priest, because when we worked together, you always had a sense of peacefulness and calm.” This is the second time someone from my past footwear profession has said that about me.

People can see God’s credibility in our lives by the language we use, and by the moral decisions they see us make everyday. I find it begins from the urgency of the heart. Do you see as Jesus sees? Jesus had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Do we see the needs of a hurting world? Now, what are we supposed to do about this?

Etty Hillesum’s commitment to occupy a certain place in the world, where others could somehow connect with God began as a seed of love which compelled her to action. She took responsibility for making God credible in the world. She took responsibility for God’s believability.

Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” So ask yourself: Why shouldn’t that witness be me? Amen.