

Third Sunday after Pentecost – 2026

Exodus 19:2-8

Romans 5:6-15

Matthew 9:35-10:20

In the movie *Man of Steel*, the pre-teen Superman has an episode that rattled his cage. Clark Kent begins to see with his x-ray vision and he doesn't like it. He can't turn it off this power and he runs away, distressed, to isolate Himself. It's pure fiction. It's a great yarn, a bit of Americana – Truth, Justice and the American way – but it's pure fiction. My vision is a bit dodgy. It used to be good (*c'est la vie*). I've seen some amazing things. The way the blue Pacific Ocean water churns green as you look out from the fantail of an aircraft carrier, watching the massive ship's wake. The wonder, the joyous drama of a child being born and then placed immediately in mother's arms. Not all of what we see is pleasant. Many of us have seen premature death up close. We've seen tears born of heartbreak. We've seen hate and shame and depression and, perhaps worst of all, rank unbelief on the face of someone created in God's image.

What did Jesus see? He was out patrolling the cities and villages. Jesus was God's grace in action, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and affliction (Matthew 9:35). And the people flocked to Him. Christ's message hit home. The Word engaged the people, and the people engaged the Word. And Jesus saw the crowds. It sounds like such a nondescript statement but think it through. Jesus saw the crowds. The Lord is omniscient – *that* is seeing. The Incarnate Son of God is aware of the forces at work in your life. He sees you. Matthew tells us that as the Lord Christ beheld the mass of humanity gathered before Him, that He was moved with compassion. Why? The short answer is that they were like sheep without a shepherd. They were harassed and helpless. That's what Jesus saw (Matthew 9:36). It's vivid language and it was a vivid sight. The Lord took it in. He didn't run. He didn't isolate Himself. Compassion was born of seeing us as we really are, what we go through, what we endure, how we are defenseless, vulnerable, prone to abuse. He saw it like you see the lights of Broadway against a dark sky, like you see the neon on the Vegas strip on a late night in December, like you see the lights on a firetruck stopping at your neighbor's house at midnight. He saw it all... and He had compassion.

Here's a short laundry list of what the Lord Christ saw. He saw a people who didn't know who to trust because so many supposed leaders had led them astray. He saw a people who struggled with a gnawing sense of their own iniquity and not knowing where to go for relief. Jesus saw a people who were vulnerable to spiritual predators, legalistic religious rulers who were preying on the guilt of their fellow man. He saw a people who longed for genuine comfort but didn't know where to turn. The people didn't have a shepherd. Harassed by Satan, helpless to conjure up for themselves a stout defense, wandering aimlessly, needing grace, needing hope, needing the truth – Jesus saw all of that. And He had compassion.

What do you see? With your renewed eyes, with your sanctified vision, with the eyes of your heart – what do you see as you look out upon our culture, our nation, our world? I assume that you see the same things that I see. You see a world that is more divided than ever – light from darkness. Unbelief, stumbling around in the dark, contributes mightily to people being harassed

and helpless. The fields are certainly white for the harvest. The harvest is plentiful (Matthew 9:37). Do you see it? Has Christ's compassion changed? Do you think that the Lord of the cross is less interested, less invested, less enthusiastic about taking His blood out into the world? Truth and grace and sacrifice and humility and forgiveness and heaven... have they changed? Is Christianity the eternal truth apart from which there is no life or is it not? Did Christ die for sinners or did He not? Does love flow from God to those who don't deserve it or does it not? Are we called to carry this Word out into the world or are we not? What do you see? Do you see a world in need of the beauty of Christ's life?

Compassion; Christ's very real compassion directed Him, prompted His to act. To be our Shepherd, the Christ must die. The sheep have a crucified Shepherd; there is no other. Compassion; it is Christ's love for you that led Him to say not a word in His own defense when the Sanhedrin accused Him. We are harassed and helpless no more. Our Savior atoned for our sin. He laid down His life, and He took it up again. We are harassed and helpless no more. The Son of God triumphed over those who would imprison us in our own guilt. To be sure, our failures needed to be addressed. Our sin is real. Our guilt is real. God is just and no one can save themselves; no one can be their own shepherd. Compassion; can you imagine how deep our Lord's love must be, that He would gladly die for sinners, for those who go back, like dogs, to their vomit. None of us have avoided sin this week. And yet compassion is all around us.

Jesus put His disciples into Harvest Mode. The Lord's concern for the sheep who were without a shepherd prompted Him to put His disciples into Harvest Mode. He told them to pray. "Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:38). And then Jesus sent them out. Proclaim the kingdom. Heal the sick. Raise the dead. Cleanse lepers. Cast out demons (Matthew 10:8). Christ gave them His authority (Matthew 10:1). The kingdom of God was at hand and all the works that the disciples performed were the signs. The people were given shepherds. The sheep were defended, lifted up, and Christ Himself was at work through His emissaries, His ambassadors to liberate humanity from the fog of aimlessness. Your God has come. Jesus told those He sent out: "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16). God's compassion was in the voices of the disciples. Christ's blood is in the message of the kingdom. The Gospel is a bloody word, a victorious word, a word that defends the sheep and blesses us with the knowledge that our Shepherd is with us.

I don't want to go back there. I don't want to go back to being harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. No one can take me back there, to darkness, to idolatry and vanity and endless guilt. I've been delivered. You've been delivered. It is finished. And compassion isn't a distant memory. Christ's victory was a Good Friday. Christ's victory was a blessed Easter and a resurrection that has changed this world. But compassion isn't merely a history lesson, not a drama that is only played out then and there. Faith in Christ is anchored on His incarnation, His suffering and His death and His triumph over the grave. Faith in Christ is also faith that through the Word and the Sacraments God truly gives to us, here and now, what Jesus won – forgiveness of our sins now, salvation enveloping us now. That is the exquisite compassion that animates this Divine Service. Sheep are shepherded in this place because Christ is present in the means of grace to reveal Himself and bring us His victory. Our trust is in Him, our Good Shepherd. I won't go back. We won't go back to being harassed and helpless because the Lord won't leave us, won't forsake us, won't stop being our Shepherd.

The fields are white for the harvest. The harvest is plentiful. The world needs the compassion of the Messianic King and that compassion is found here. Christ is here. With His body and blood, with His love and His mercy and His strength and His courage. He shares His life with us. He hones our awareness of God's goodness. He instills in us a longing for heaven. He leads us to keep His commandments. He prompts us to sacrifice for others. He balms our wounds. He forges His church. He provides a sanctuary from the world. He enlightens our minds. He grows our love. He makes us a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Christ showed His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8 NIV). He shows you His love now. He sees you. He sees you and He loves you. He sees you and He loves you and He shepherds you. None of us are going back.