

Vicar Andrew Wolfgram
Text: Matthew 9:35-10:8
Date: June 18, 2017
Setting: Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

First for the Jews, then for the Gentiles

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Compassion. What does it mean to have compassion? The dictionary defines compassion as: “a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.” We heard in our Gospel reading about Jesus having compassion on His people, the people of Israel. The Greek word for compassion in our Gospel reading is *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (*splagchnizomai*). It is a feeling in your gut, a feeling of emotion. It is defined as: “the inward parts,' especially the nobler entrails – the heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys. These gradually came to denote the seat of the affections." This is much the same way we refer to an emotion in our hearts, rather than in our heads. One’s whole body feels the emotion, this compassion.

Jesus felt in his body this feeling of compassion for His own people. What had brought about this emotion for Jesus? He saw the state that His chosen people were living in, specifically how the religious authorities treated them. They had been waiting for the coming Messiah, but the religious authorities had led them astray. They were harassed and helpless, tossed about by evil spiritual forces around them that are beyond their control. Their unfortunate spiritual condition is caused in part by the failure of their spiritual leaders. Though not sinless, the people were still astray like sheep.

Jesus wanted to send laborers out to care for His people and prays to His Father in heaven for this to happen. Jesus answers His own prayer right away by choosing 12 of his disciples to send as apostles. The odd thing is that He sends them only to the people of Israel. Just last Sunday, we heard the Great Commission where Jesus sent out the disciples to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In a sense, we are going back in time to before Christ's arrest, crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

We may ask why only Israel? Well, Israel was God's chosen people. It was especially for them. They were the people of the promise. They were the ones watching and waiting for their Messiah to come. They were God's people, who He delivered and led out of Egypt. God's people, who had seen Him open the Red Sea and swallow Pharaoh's army. God's people, who had seen the walls of Jericho fall at the sound of the trumpet. God's people who had seen Him deliver and preserve them repeatedly. Their ancestors had seen the mighty acts of God and they were now still waiting for their coming Messiah.

God had given the people leaders to guide and direct them, but as time went on, these leaders began to lead the people astray. They led, not with the compassion that Jesus showed, but with pride in their own works, pride in their ability to fulfill the law, or at least the thought that they could fulfill the law. They used this pride to show how much better they were than the rest of the people. As a result, God's people were led astray. They didn't always stay on the straight and narrow. True, the people of Israel sinned, but the religious leaders, especially at this point, weren't helping them get back on the right track. Jesus saw what had happened in the past and He had compassion on them. He wanted to care for His people.

And so he sent out the apostles. For the harvest was plentiful but the laborers were few. But not all followed what they had to say, not all followed Jesus. And while in the end Christ did

indeed come for all, He came first for the Jews. Jesus started with the people who were promised His coming. At times, it appeared that Israel was supporting the idea of Jesus as the coming Messiah.

The support for Jesus seemed promising on Palm Sunday when the people cried out “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” The people of Israel, except for the religious authorities, wanted Jesus to deliver them. They wanted Jesus to have mercy on them. To have compassion on them. But within the next week those cries of exultation would be turned to cries for His blood to be spilled. Christ came for the people of Israel, to have compassion on them, but they crucified him.

We may want to look back to when Christ was crucified and shake our heads in disgust but then we remember, our sin, your sin, my sin, that put Christ on the cross. We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Christ may have come to save the lost sheep of Israel, but in His great compassion, in His *σπλαγχνίζομαι (splanchnizomai)*, he died for all. He died for the sins we commit when we fail to have compassion and to love our neighbor as yourself. He died for the sins of when we go astray from following His Word which directs our life.

As He walked upon this earth, He not only suffered with us, as the word compassion addresses, but He suffered for us on the cross and rose again on the third day. So He continues to lead us through this life and set for us an example of our to live. We see how to have compassion on those around us. We suffer, not for ourselves but in order to spread the message of the Gospel to the entire world. We have compassion on others as we care for them. We suffer with them.

Jesus ministry started in and to Israel, but it doesn't end there. The harvest spoken about includes you and me.

As Paul says in Romans 1:16- "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile."

That is not only for the people of Israel, but also us as well. First for the Jew, then for the Gentile. In His compassion, Christ died and rose for you and for me for the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21