

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, January 7, 2018**

**SEEING THE MISSION THROUGH JESUS' EYES**

**Matthew 9:35-38**

Despite the cold temps, it has been an eventful weekend here at Faith. Yesterday we had our Vision Advance Workshop with Ken Priddy, which many of you attended. Earlier this morning we had breakfast with Chris and Robyn Zickmund, hearing about their missionary work in Belgium. We have prayed for Stephanie Fry, who departs tomorrow for Haiti and the new beginning of her missionary work there. We have ordained and installed ruling elders and deacons for servant leadership in the life of our church family. In a little while we will celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper together. But first, I want to talk with you for a few minutes about Jesus. I want to talk with you about what propelled Jesus in His ministries of teaching, preaching, and healing, and how it relates to us. I want to talk with you about the mission Jesus has for His church, and about seeing the mission through the eyes of Jesus.

**COMPASSION**

In a word, what motivated Jesus in His itinerant ministry as He traveled through the towns and villages of Galilee teaching and preaching and healing every kind of disease and sickness, was compassion. Compassion born of love. When Jesus saw the crowds that came to Him, Matthew says in verse 36, "He had compassion on them." He felt *for* them (which is the meaning of the Greek word *splanchnizomai*) and He felt *with* them (which is the sense of the Latin word *compassio*). *The Message* says: "His heart broke for them." The New Testament verb that means "to have compassion" more literally means "to feel in the bowels or intestines." It is an attempt to express the depth of feeling we have for or about people experiencing some kind of hardship or need. Of the 12 times the verb occurs in the Gospels, it is used eight times to refer to the compassion of Jesus for others.

[See the feeding of the 5,000 (Matthew 14:14; Mark 6:34) and then the 4,000 (Matthew 15:32; Mark 8:2), along with the healing of a man with leprosy (Mark 1:41), the healing of two blind beggars (Matthew 20:34) and the raising of a widow's son from the dead (Luke 7:13).]

In one instance (Mark 9:22), the father of a boy with an evil spirit appeals to Jesus to have compassion on his son – which Jesus does as He proceeds to cast out the evil spirit and to heal the boy (Mark 9:25-27). The verb is also used by Jesus on three occasions: in speaking of the compassion of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:33), the compassion of the father of the prodigal son for his son (Luke 15:20), and, negatively, of the unmerciful debtor who refuses to have compassion on his fellow-servant, even though he himself has received mercy from his master (Matthew 18:27).

Compassion, you see, was part of Jesus' DNA. He was a man who incarnated (embodied) compassion, a man who was motivated by a deep reservoir of loving compassion and compassionate love for people. And not only for people in need of food or physical healing,

or facing some other extremity in life. What causes Jesus' deep compassion here in Matthew 9 is not sickness or hunger or some other physical or material need. What sparks the compassion of Jesus in this case is "the great spiritual need of the people" (Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 33a, 260).

Jesus had compassion on the crowds He encountered as He traveled through the towns and villages of Galilee because they were, as Matthew says, "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36). They had been let down by their religious leaders. They had been misled and mistreated by the spiritual shepherds who were supposed to watch over them. They had been bullied and oppressed by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, who laid heavy burdens on the people's shoulders (Matthew 23:4) and looked down on them with an air of spiritual superiority. They felt helpless to throw off the unbiblical burdens their leaders required them to carry.

Jesus saw it. And it broke His heart. More than anything, Jesus wanted them – and people in every generation, right up to this moment in history – to know the grace and power and peace and freedom of the gospel, the grace and power and peace and freedom that come not from some mystical spiritual experience or from adhering to a list of Do's and Don'ts, but from trusting in Jesus and His saving power to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

The heart of Jesus is a heart of compassion for people in need. Which is all of us. The heart of Jesus is a heart of compassion for sinners who need a Savior. Which is all of us, including our neighbors and friends who do not yet know Him as Savior and Lord of their lives.

It has been said that the compassion of Jesus is "the cornerstone of the mission of the church" (Douglas O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, 275). Do you see that? The Christian mission starts with the loving compassion of Jesus that you can see and, I hope, feel in the description of the heart and motivation of Jesus in these verses.

Jesus saw His mission field and was filled with compassion. As a church, we have a mission field, too, right here in Kingstowne and the surrounding communities. I think Jesus wants us to see our mission field through His eyes of compassion. With His heart of compassion for spiritually lost, misguided, confused, hurting people. Like our neighbors in "the red zone" area around our church. I know some of you don't like that term. That's OK. I happen to like it. I think I actually suggested it. But I really don't care what we call it. What I care about is that we – as a church family and as individual members of the body of Christ – care enough about our neighbors and friends and family members and co-workers and classmates to figure out meaningful ways to connect with them, share our faith with them, invite them to put their faith in Jesus for salvation, enfold them in the church, and help them to grow in grace and knowledge as disciples of the Lord Jesus ... and then actually do it. That is what I care about. I believe it is what Jesus cares about. I hope you care about it, too.

The circumstances of the people who are geographically closest to us today are far different from the people in the crowds Jesus encountered in His travels through Galilee. But in some respects the condition of people in Kingstowne and surrounding communities is not so different at all. Spiritually, it is the same. People today are just as lost without Jesus as they

were in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Some people today feel no need for God in their lives. They don't care about God. Life is good just the way it is. As far as they are concerned, they have everything they need. Some have created a "god" or belief system of their own to approve of the lifestyle choices and decisions they have made. Some have never heard of Jesus or, at least, have never seriously considered His claims to be the Son of God, Savior of sinners, and Lord of life. Some have built their lives on a foundation that may seem fine for now but will not withstand the storms and tests and troubles that come into every life. Some think they have discovered the path to personal fulfillment. And, for a while, maybe even a long time, it may appear that they have chosen the right path.

Jesus sees through all of this. But He does not look down on the lost people of this world. He does not look at the lost people of our community with anger or condemnation in His heart. And He doesn't just tolerate them. He looks at them with compassion and love. He feels for them and desires for them to open their eyes and hearts to Him in faith.

D. A. Carson tells about going to the beach with a friend for some R&R. He was looking forward to some much-needed peace and quiet. But when they got there, they found a horde of high school kids celebrating graduation with lots of beer, loud music, and, as he says, "public displays of affection." Not the sorts of things that we would approve of. Carson says: "Deeply disappointed that my relaxation was being shattered by a raucous party, I was getting ready to cover my disappointment by moral outrage." He turned to his friend to unload his venom but stopped as he saw him staring at the scene with a faraway look in his eyes. Then his friend said softly: "High school kids – what a mission field!"

In other words, like Jesus, Carson's friend had compassion on them. Like Jesus, he looked at them with eyes of love. The same can be said of any age group, affinity group, or demographic: "What a mission field!"

Compassion for lost people compelled Jesus to teach about God and life with God, to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, and to heal every kind of sickness and disease from which they suffered.

## **PRAYER**

This same compassion for spiritually lost people compelled Jesus to call His disciples to pray. "The harvest is plentiful," He says, "but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field" (9:37-38).

What we see here is that if compassion – the compassion of Jesus – is the motive for our mission as His followers, the means of our mission are prayer and people (O'Donnell, 277). There is a need for prayer – passionate, persistent, heartfelt, devoted prayer. Which is something you can do, regardless of your age or health. It is something each of us can do personally. It is something we can do in our small groups and Sunday School classes and ministry teams. It is something we can do as a church family united. We can pray. Jesus tells His disciples (and us by extension) to pray. It is more than a suggestion.

One of the most remarkable spiritual revivals in American history began in September 1857 when a businessman in New York City, Jeremiah Lamphier, felt prompted by God to invite people to pray during their lunch hour one day a week. The first day, Lamphier prayed alone for half an hour, but was then joined by six other men. The next week, nearly 40 came. Then they began to meet for prayer daily. Soon there were 100 people. In less than six months, 6,000 people were meeting in 150 different locations in Brooklyn and Manhattan to pray. In less than a year, the prayer movement had spread to cities such as Boston, Baltimore, Washington, D. C., Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis, and New Orleans. In June 1858, it was estimated that nearly 100,000 people had come to faith in Christ, not through preaching or works of charity, but through the prayers and witness of these praying Christians.

Will God do something as dramatic as this again if we commit ourselves to pray ... and to pray together? I don't know. I guess there is only one way to find out. It doesn't have to be at noon. It doesn't have to be here at church. It can take place anywhere. There is a small group that meets for prayer here at church every Monday evening. I know they would love to have others join them.

## **PEOPLE**

Jesus tells us to pray. For what? For workers. For laborers to work in the Lord's harvest field. Notice: It is not a harvest issue; it is a laborer issue. It is workers who are needed to bring in the harvest of souls that God is gathering in Himself. We have a mandate from the Lord Jesus Himself to pray, and to pray specifically for people to labor in the Lord's mission field. It is not that we are not to pray for people who don't yet know Christ as Savior and Lord. We should. But here Jesus is telling us to pray for people to serve in His mission field.

So, just as there is a need to pray, there is a need for people to go. This need for people to go out in Jesus' name includes people like Stephanie Fry (Haiti) and Chris and Robyn Zickmund (Belgium). It includes all of the missionaries we support. But it also includes us, because God is calling us as His church to be His missionaries in Kingstowne and the surrounding communities.

"The harvest," says Jesus, "is plentiful." The harvest is abundant. It is larger than we imagine. In the 2,000 years since the days of Jesus' incarnation, millions and millions of men, women, girls, and boys have found salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning death on the cross for undeserving sinners. Think about that. Think about the fact that you and I, if we sincerely trust in Christ for salvation and desire His help to live a holy life, are part of the harvest. We are included in the harvest. It is impossible to calculate the actual size of this spiritual harvest. But we can be sure that it is epic.

I said that I wanted to talk with you for a few minutes this morning about Jesus and seeing the mission through His eyes. I've gone much longer than a few minutes. But I feel passionate about the compassionate heart of Jesus and His desire for us as a church to join in the harvest of souls He is gathering to Himself, including souls in His harvest field right here in Kingstowne, where too many people do not yet know or follow the King of Kings.

Will you ask the Lord Jesus to enable you to see the mission through His eyes of compassion?

Will you ask Him to give you His heart of compassion for the spiritually lost people in our community?

Will you pray for the Lord to raise up laborers to serve in His harvest fields here and around the world?

Will you be part of the answer to this prayer? Will we as a church?

Lord, let it be so. Amen.