

Mission Motivation
Matthew 9:35-10:4

Back in July of 2007, a month before we moved out here to Calgary – my daughter and I had gone out to do some shopping in Toronto or something like that, and we were on our way back home driving... no, actually we were barely moving at all because we were stuck in rush hour traffic on highway 401.

So it was about 3pm in the afternoon, we're stuck in the middle of eight lanes of east-bound traffic, its getting hot, we're barely moving along at all and I'm starting to feel like dozing off a bit...when all of a sudden I notice something up ahead, running around on the road.

As I got closer I could see it was a stray kitten – what it was doing on the highway I don't know. Either a negligent pet owner had cruelly abandoned it, or somehow it was a stray that had managed to get itself onto the highway, get across 7 lanes of traffic and now it was stuck in the far left lane trying to figure out how to get away from the cars.

But while didn't know how it got there - I did know what that this kitten was absolutely terrified! You could see it in the way it was running around helter-skelter all over the place trying to get away from the cars.

Every so often it would frantically throw itself at the center median in a attempt to climb over and escape – but its paws couldn't grip the concrete and the kitten would just fall back down and continue its terror-stricken dash in and out of the traffic.

Now I'm not really a touchy-feeling sort of guy – but come on...a kitten... stuck in rush hour traffic, on highway 401, the poor thing! Plus I've got my daughter in the car watching the whole thing and she's almost in tears. I had to do something...

So I pulled the car over and got out and I took a blanket from my trunk and proceed to chase after the kitten, trying to catch it so I could get it out of the traffic.

Now I tell you this story not because I want to brag or have you think of me as a wonderfully sensitive guy who rescues

stranded kittens, but because it's a good example of how *seeing something* can move you to take action.

You probably have your own stories about things that you've *seen* - which motivated you to take action.

Maybe one time you saw a child standing in the grocery store all by themselves, crying – and you took them over to the customer service desk, to help them find their mom.

Or maybe you noticed a kid getting picked on by a bunch of other kids at the park, and you stepped in and stopped the bullying.

And many people have been motivated to take action after returning from a trip to a developing nation and having witnessed first-hand the plight of children living in extreme poverty.

Friends, when we see something that touches us, we are moved to take action, and that's what we see happening to Jesus in the scripture passage that we read this morning.

Let's take a closer look at this, starting with vs. 35.

Jesus has been going through all the cities and towns of Israel, ministering to them by giving them correct teaching on what it meant to be God's people – having a covenant relationship with God, and preaching the kingdom – or proclaiming that a new era of being God's people had started and then healing people as proof that this new era was here.

And as He goes throughout Israel doing this, Jesus gets a sense of where the people at, of what the underlying issues are. It's not just that people are ignorant, that people aren't aware of the Kingdom of God, that people are sick; the underlying issue is that the people need a godly leadership.

Verse 36 tells us that Jesus saw the crowds...and that the crowds were "helpless and harassed, like sheep without shepherd" and like a field that is ripe for the harvest without workers.

Now let's take a moment to appreciate the weight of these agricultural metaphors.

Sheep are stupid animals, they are not very bright or intelligent, they don't defend themselves against predators, running water scares them and they wander as they eat without paying attention to where they are going and end up getting themselves lost.

But we really can't fault them for it, that's just how they are. And it's important to note that Jesus isn't angry at the people for being ignorant and sick. What he sees is that they need is a good shepherd who will watch out for them, guard them and guide them, leads them to still water and suitable pastures and go after them and bring them back when they wander off.

Jesus saw the crowds as sheep – *in need of a shepherd*

Jesus also sees the crowds as a field ripe for harvest, but the crop is going to go to waste because there are no workers to gather it in.

There are few things in life more disheartening than seeing a field full of ripe produce go to waste because no one is able to harvest it. All that food... which could feed hungry people,

which could be stored away for hard times, which could become seed to plant next years crop, it all just sits and rots and goes to waste.

Jesus saw the crowds as a ripe field – *in need of harvesters*

What Jesus saw broke His heart; it moved Him and motivated Him. Verse 36 says Jesus had compassion on the crowds. And in verse 38 He takes action. He turns to his disciples and says “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Now friends I have to ask, what do we see when we look around at our community?

I see a community with good city services, a new Rec Center and high school and well equipped private schools. I see new developments and business opportunities. I see affluent families who live in nice houses and drive luxury SUV's, and I see children who have their every need and whim provided for by doting parents.

What I see at first glance, in all honest friends, doesn't touch me or break my heart – or motivate me to take action, and I suspect the same is true for you.

But if we look at our community through Jesus eyes' we might see it a bit differently. In Rev 3:17 Jesus says something which speaks to the mindset which assumes that because people are wealthy and prosperous that they have, or that there are no other needs in life.

He says ¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

It might be more helpful to us if we change the pronouns so it says – you say “they are rich, they have acquired wealth and do not need a thing”. But you do not realize they are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

Friends, take another look at our community on a spiritual level and you will see that a level of poverty exists that should break our hearts and motivate us to take action, especially where it concerns children.

If you look around you will see that most children are being left to fend for themselves spiritually. They are malnourished, underfed, and they are starving for the truth of Christ and a relationship with Him.

Children are vulnerable, they are easily scared off or led astray; they are unaware of the dangers of the false teachings that are so prevalent in the media and in our secular education system.

They are growing up with no knowledge of their creator, no self awareness of their capacity for sin and evil, no good news that God has sent Christ to forgive us and change us, no hope for the future of a new heavens and a new earth.

Instead they are growing up to believe that truth is relative, that all paths lead to God, that religion is here simply to make you feel good about yourself, that you should find what works for you, that human beings ultimately decide what is right or wrong.

They are like sheep, helpless and harassed – in need of a good shepherd to teach them the truth and guide them.

And they are like a ripe field that will go to waste, all of these privileged children in our community. Children who have been given every advantage in life, the best care and education, their parents are CEO's, financial managers, Oil company execs, and they will go on to take their parent's place in society in the future...

But unless there are workers to gather in the harvest, these children will go on to become influential people in our society who are spiritually impoverished, spiritually immature and spiritually malformed. And all of their talents, their accomplishments, their potential – in the end it's all just a waste, because their lives were not lived for the Kingdom of Heaven which goes into eternity.

As Jesus says “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Mark 8:36)

The children of our community are like a field...ripe for the harvest – but no one is working in the fields!

Friends, do you see it? Do you see the sheep in need of a shepherd; do you see the fields needing workers? Does it

touch you? Does it break your heart? Are you moved with compassion?

Because when we see something that touches us, we are motivated to take action and do something about it. But what can we do? What should we do?

Do we take it upon ourselves to pull the car over in the middle of rush hour and jump out and rescue the stranded kitten? (I managed to rescue it and we sent him to the humane society, just in case you were wondering.)

Friends, take note that Jesus instructs his disciple to do in vs. 38. He says pray about the situation. “Ask the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into his harvest field”

You see, contrary to popular thinking, praying is not passive reflection or a means of stalling a course of action, (e.g good idea... let me pray about it.) It is pro-active active petitioning. Jesus says “notify the Lord of the harvest that His field is ready, and he better get some workers into it!”

Because the Lord of the harvest is the one to whom the fields belong, it is His crop, so we have no right to simply jump into His field and begin to muck about. There may be some specific instructions about how to harvest a particular crop that we need to be aware of.

Now, the good news is that the church has been authorized as a worker for the Lord of the harvest. And as soon as Jesus instructs his disciples to pray for workers, the next chapter begins with the answer to that prayer.

Chapter 10:1 says Jesus “called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness” And then it lists specifically who these twelve were, Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, Philip, Bartholomew, the other James and the other Simon, Mathew, Thaddaeus and Judas.

So we see, that those whom Jesus called, are those upon whom the church was built. They were authorized to go out as workers into the ripe fields and bring in the harvest by driving out the evil spirits who were harassing the flock, and healing the diseases which plagued them.

Friends, Jesus never rescinded that authorization. In fact He only reiterated it and increased it. Later on He gave the disciples the Great Commission – go make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18) and He sent them the Holy Spirit to equip them for that task (Acts 2)

So friends, we are authorized and equipped to step into the field which needs workers and begin to gather in the crop, and we do so by being good shepherds to the sheep.

And friends, there are four things that we need to do as good shepherds.

1. We need to gather the sheep
2. We need to feed and water the sheep
3. We need to protect the sheep
4. We need to lead them to their owner

Friends we need to focus our energies and efforts in going through our community to build relationships with children and their families, and meet the needs they have for quality programs and activities which enrich children. Gather the sheep

When we gathered them, they need to be fed, good food – the bread from heaven, the Word of God. We need to tell children the stories of the bible – from Genesis to Revelation.

We need to make those stories come alive – because they are alive in our own life. Children need the water of praise and worship and to experience what it is like to joyfully sing and give thanks to Jesus, and we can model that for them. Feed and water the sheep.

And we need to protect them – not just by having safe practices and police checks for volunteers, but by alerting them and their parents to the dangers of so many false teachings that are out there.

So, we stand up and fight off the threat of false teachings, we point out the poisonous lies in our society, we gently steer them away from the quicksand of other religions. We protect the sheep.

And we do this all because we are going somewhere with them and we want them all to make it. We are leading them home, to their owner, to their master – to Jesus Christ.

Remember friends, children have a special place with Jesus, and when people do not allow kids to come to him, He gets upset.

Mark 10:14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Friends we can clear a path for kids to come to Christ in our community. We have been authorized by Jesus to do so and we have been given spiritual gifts to equip us for this task.

And every gift – each part of the body can be used to support this mission. From the obvious ones of teaching the faith, of shepherding, and evangelism to the gifts of helping – where you are mowing the church lawn and getting rid of the thistles in preparation for a kids event, and generosity where you are financially underwriting the cost of doing this mission.

Everybody in our church has a part to play as we gather, feed and water, protect and lead them to Jesus Christ.

So Friends, pray to the Lord of the Harvest that He will motivate all of us for this mission and send us out into our community to lead kids to Christ. Amen.