



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JUNE 14, 2026

GENESIS 18:1-15; PSALM 116:1, 10-17; ROMANS 5:1-8; MATTHEW 9:35-10:8

DOUBLING DOWN ON COMPASSION

Matthew 9:35-10:8 [Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he 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.” Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.”]

It helps to know the whole story. Otherwise, it's too easy to turn today's Gospel into a “gotcha” moment and put Jesus or Matthew, our Gospel writer, on trial for smallness of heart.

Sound bites have always been dangerous. Taken out of context, Jesus sounds uncharacteristically stingy here – giving the disciples

authority to heal the sick, but only within a certain radius. As a Gentile myself, I'm a little put off. Where does he get off telling them not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans, as if there's only so much compassion to go around?

On a human level, I get it. It's hard to face the reality that some of us live long, healthy lives while others of us

don't. Sit with that injustice long enough, combine it with survivor guilt, and it stretches the limits of our compassion. Think about it. If we saw all the world's suffering in real time, we wouldn't be able to see anything else. No wonder we look for lines to draw – bloodlines or borders or political divides that can help us rank our loves and stop compassion from crushing us. I understand the impulse. It's just not worthy of Jesus – or his followers.

To be fair, Matthew is the only Gospel writer to put these words in Jesus' mouth. But even within his book as a whole, they don't make sense – at least, not as a lasting directive. Gentiles are part of his telling of Jesus' story from the beginning. It's Matthew who brings the decidedly non-Jewish wise men into the Christmas story – Matthew who views Jesus as a light to the nations from the start. Matthew lifts up the faith of a Roman centurion and later a Canaanite woman, and his Jesus doesn't withhold healing from either of them. And at the end of the book, it's Matthew's Jesus who tells his followers to make disciples

of all nations. So then, why limit the scope of the disciples' work at all?

Perhaps it's because they don't have the whole story yet. The good news of Jesus reaches its fullest meaning on the other side of Easter. Why go prime time when the story's only half told? Or maybe this is Matthew's attempt as a Jew to show God's ongoing faithfulness to Israel – that God hasn't left them for a younger model. It's also possible, though, that Jesus is making a different point. It might have been easier for the disciples if Jesus had told them in this moment to go off on some foreign mission trip, so they could be their best selves with strangers who don't know their whole stories. It's a lot simpler to reinvent yourself as someone with authority when you can make a fresh start, when there's no one to remind you of the fool you were before.

Jesus doesn't let them ignore the suffering right in front of them for the sake of a clean slate elsewhere. Compassion does not end at home, but it might start there. Perhaps, in fact, it's their closeness to their fellow lost sheep that makes healing here possible on all sides – the

recognition of their shared brokenness, their inability to make a distinction between “us” and “them” that will finally break their hearts wide open and release the true power of compassion.

Or maybe Jesus is just seeing his disciples as they are and what they’re currently capable of. In slowing down the narrative and listing them by name, Matthew reminds us that Jesus, in fact, knows their whole stories and what they still need to learn. He won’t let them go off half-cocked into other cultures with their good intentions and nothing else. As many of us were reminded at yesterday’s anti-racism training, the work of building trust across communities that have historically been divided is hard and delicate. Cultural humility requires care, patience, accountability, and yes, compassion – things the disciples are nowhere near mastering at this point. Perhaps starting with a smaller circle is exactly how they’ll build their capacity to engage in the long, slow, real work of restored relationships and healing.

What does this have to do with us? I’m thinking about this in relation to our justice work as a cathedral as we deepen relationships with communities outside our walls – our migrant neighbors, the unhoused and addicted on our streets, those we’re trying to impact with our affordable housing project, our international mission partners. I’m also thinking about it in relation to how we care for each other up close in small groups, in home visits, in pastoral care – and how we treat those who disagree with us in any aspect of our lives.

In the onslaught of our 24-hour news cycle, compassion fatigue is real. It is a spiritual danger, and if we don’t stop and resist the snap judgments that come from sound bite-sized attention spans, we too will start looking for lines to draw. Fueled by fears of scarcity, we too might get drawn into narratives that guard our hearts by dehumanizing those whose suffering overwhelms us. It’s understandable; it’s just not worthy of us.

The good news: it’s not our only choice. We can step back and try to learn the whole story. We can

remember that, as Paul reminds us in Romans, God's love has already been poured into our hearts by the Spirit that's been given to us. And that well is bottomless. It never runs dry. So, we don't have to make ourselves feel better for our failures of compassion by putting others on trial. We don't have to look for "gotcha" moments to ease our own consciences. And we don't have to

do any of this alone; in fact, we shouldn't. We were never meant to carry the world's pain alone. When we let our hearts break wide open together, the full power of God's compassion is unleashed on this world— and we all find healing in the process. May it be so. Amen.



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