

There's Something You Can Do

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Pentecost 3a 6-18-23 Pastor Pufahl

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Have you ever had a gut reaction? Have you ever said, "I feel it in my gut," or talked about gut instincts? Think about what you're saying. You're talking about feelings coming from your stomach and intestines. That's a weird picture, but it's true. Have you ever been so nervous, frightened, scared, tense, or sad that you didn't just feel it, but you really felt it, literally, in your gut? It almost hurt. Our feelings and emotions can make themselves felt and known physically. That's where that figure of speech came from.

You can't see it in the NIV, but Jesus had a gut reaction today. Matthew tells us that when Jesus looked at all the crowds following him, begging to hear his words and feel his touch, **He had compassion on them.** The Greek verb comes from the noun meaning "bowels" or "intestines." Compassion is a gut reaction.

We're big on gut reactions. We see the footage of shootings or natural disasters and we're moved, sometimes even to tears by the suffering, death, and loss. We watch news stories about children abused, abandoned, or worse, and it hurts us in our guts. We find out that a friend or neighbor's spouse has been diagnosed with inoperable cancer or died just last night, and we're moved in our innermost parts. Our husband loses his job or our friend's marriage is falling apart, and we're torn up. Gut reactions!

We have them when at church too. We hear missions at home and abroad are forced to close because there isn't enough support for them. We try to have a planned outreach event but sometimes feel like it would be easier if we didn't, because there aren't enough volunteers to help. The treasurer reports that we have to cut back everything because the budget isn't balanced. And we hurt. It rocks us to the core. Gut reactions!

And we're good at gut reactions. We're good at feeling compassion. You know what else we're good at? We're good at shaking our fist or shedding a tear or lamenting the situation that led to this horrible end. "Oh my goodness! This is horrible! How did this ever happen? What a world in which we live! Things never used to be this way." We're good at discussing these problems. We're good at forming task forces and committees to study the problem. We produce reports and recommendations and resolutions. We come up with ideas and the perfect solution to the problems.

And you know what else we're good at? We're good at excuses. "Oh, I wish I had the time to help. I wish I had the patience to work with this problem. I wish I wasn't too old or too young. I wish I had the resources." We're good at analyzing the problem; we're not as good about doing anything about the problem. When it comes time to pray, preach, serve, or support... "That's not my job. You've got the wrong guy." We see a helpless, hopeless, shepherdless, wandering world, and we're moved to our deepest, most innermost places, but not so much as we'd carve out any time to do anything about it except talk.

What if Jesus had done that? What if Jesus had looked at this crowd, correctly analyzed them as **helpless and harassed, like sheep without a shepherd**, and said, "Gee, I sure wish there was something I could do about that, but..." What if Jesus had answered the summons of his Father by saying, "Well, I sure would like to help with that whole forgiving sins business, but I just don't have the time." What if Jesus had formed an angelic committee to

study the idea of saving the world by living, dying, and rising in our place, and simply put forward the recommendation, “Let it be resolved: SOMEONE should live, die, and rise for the sins of the world.”

But he didn't. He didn't do that to the people before him in our text today. He wasn't just filled with compassion. He didn't just have a gut reaction. He followed his gut reaction. His gut reaction led him to go **through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.** His gut reaction led him to announce the need, **The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few,** and his gut reaction was to do something about it: he sent out the twelve apostles to preach and teach, to heal and cast out demons.

His gut reaction was to not just say, “Someone should love these people,” but to show the full extent of his love. He stretched out his hands above the crowds and said, **Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.** He stretched out his hands above the crowds on Calvary's hill and said, **Father, forgive them.** He stretched out scarred but living hands above the shocked and awed apostles and said, **Peace be with you.** I'm alive.”

He didn't just feel compassion. He compassioned us. He gathered us lost sheep back into his sheep pen. He cleaned our wounds, bandaged them, and made them well. He healed us. He gave us a home, an eternal home. He said, “You were dead; you're alive again. You were lost; you're found. I'm your Good Shepherd, and no one can snatch you out of my hands...EVER!”

And he doesn't just say it. He expresses it by literally washing us clean, touching us with his gentle hands in the waters of baptism, cleansing our wounds, breathing new life into us. He expresses it personally by putting into our hands his body and blood, what he gave because his gut moved him to, and says, “For you.”

That's what Jesus did. He had a gut reaction. And he did something. There's something you can do too. Jesus says, **Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.** Beg the Lord to move the hearts of men and women to serve in the public ministry as pastors and teachers. And don't just ask, identify sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, friends of your own, perhaps yourselves, as people who have the gifts and abilities to serve and encourage them. There are some among us who have gifts that could be used in public service for Christ, gathering in the harvest.

But it doesn't stop there. Don't just pray. Don't just encourage. Serve and support. There's a harvest surrounding your home and your desk at work. Work that field! Whatever gifts you have, use them to God's glory in the world and in the church. Whatever time, talents, and treasures Jesus has poured out upon you, use them to God's glory in the world, but also in his Church. You do the work we do here with your time, your talents, and your treasures. And you also do the work of the Wisconsin Synod. You train pastors and teachers. You plant and support missions throughout America. You take Jesus to the harassed and helpless billions throughout the world. *Let none hear you idly saying, “There is nothing I can do!”*

There's something you can do. Because Christ did it for you. He felt the ultimate compassion, the supreme gut reaction, and didn't just feel it, but did something about it. He saw the lost sheep. He found the lost sheep. At Calvary's cross and garden's tomb, he proved that **freely [we] have received.** Now we can **freely give.** And so, **As you go, preach this message, ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’** You're standing in it. Jesus wants everyone in it. Amen.