

Let us pray: Lord of the harvest, help us see. Amen.

Prayer is a dangerous thing...

I find it a bit humorous, or at least ironic, that the disciples prayed for workers to be sent into the harvest fields only to find out that they were praying for themselves and didn't know it. They were the ones Jesus wanted to send. Sometimes the answer to our prayers for change start with us.

Prayer is a dangerous thing, indeed.

Jesus wants us to stay in the story. Jesus has sent you and me, Good Shepherd. God has something for us to do.

When we are sent what does that look like?

It seems to me that we might know we are being sent when it involves bringing healing to a hurting world. We might know that we are being sent when the task seems impossible. Something we can't do in our own power. We might know we are being sent when it involves risk and great personal cost. Now isn't that exciting!

The question is, are we living safe or sent? How much do we really trust God? What kind of community will Good Shepherd be?

Being sent also starts with seeing. Jesus looks around and sees the distressed and downtrodden. What he sees moves him with gut wrenching compassion. It motivated his actions.

Jesus wants us to see people through his eyes. Sometimes we look around and see nothing. Nope. Nothing out of the ordinary here, Jesus. We see nothing, so we feel nothing. Sometimes people and circumstances don't register on our radars. Sometimes out of convenience. Sometimes we just have blind spots.

Jesus tells us, look up! Open your eyes! See what I see! Pray to the Lord of the harvest to see your fields of work.

Most of the time, our biggest fields of work will be in right in our own backyards. With our families and friends. In our neighborhoods and communities. We don't have to look far to find people who are harassed and helpless.

Maybe even some of us today feel more like harassed and helpless sheep, than we feel like eager and adventurous disciples. Some of us may be feeling a little weary and challenged by the struggles of life.

Our calling starts here, in community. We are sent to one another. Is there a brother or sister in Christ who could use the healing that comes from a gentle smile, a helpful hand, or listening ear?

God has knit us together as God's little flock in this place we call Good Shepherd. And together we are so precious to God.

Being a healing community starts right here with us. Do we embody a spirit of compassion and healing among one another? Do we bring near the Kingdom of Heaven in our interactions? Are we casting out our own demons of materialism, greed, division and envy?

There is a cost to compassion. It might require some time and energy, maybe money, maybe setting aside our own egos. Valuing the needs of others at least as highly as we value our own needs doesn't always come easy.

When you consider helping someone, what is the cost that most concerns you? Pray the Lord of the Harvest.

The disciples were first sent to their own people. There are different reasons for this. But ultimately, God did have more in mind. God was about to blast them out of their comfort zones, and send them like sheep among wolves into a dangerous world. Into places where they would not be very popular, but persecuted. The cost of discipleship would be high. Some local training would help build up those spiritual muscles. We might go India tomorrow, but today, what do we see?

Jesus is pretty straight forward. He warns us that following him won't always be easy. But he promises that through his Spirit we will be able to withstand whatever difficulties may come.

Trials, troubles, and tribulations may come. But they will also provide opportunities for us to build our spiritual muscles of diligence, determination and character. Going through difficult times can draw us closer to God (Romans 5:4-5).

Will you continue to serve God even when life stinks?! Jesus wants us to keep on keeping on. To persist in the face of life's difficulties. And to know, to really know, and then also to experience, that God is with us, always.

The harvest is ultimately about change. It's about transformation, re-formation. Church is a movement, we are sent out to bring to fruition to every seed and stalk in our fields.

Some fruit ripens fast. We've seen this in many of the ministries here at Good Shepherd. Some fruit ripens very slowly. But even when we can't quite see the fruits of our labor, we are to be faithful farmers, trusting that God is at work even while we are waiting. The results will come. They may come slowly as part of a larger process. Some seeds may not come to fruition until after our lifetimes. Our job is to be faithful, and leave the results to God.

We believe in a God who is a healer, a restorer. A God of compassion. A God who sends us into the margins, into places of conflict and hate, to the helpless and harassed, not to bring harm or injury, but to bring help and healing. To announce in both our words and in our actions, "the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

What kind of community will Good Shepherd be?

We can take responsibility for our fields. We can trust God in all things. We can be a healing community. A community of whole-hearted people.

A community where people will look at us and say this is the real deal. A community that can bring healing, not only within itself, but to a city, a state, even a country. Living in such a way that we heal people with our lives. Our fractured world sure needs it.

God calls ordinary people to do extraordinary work. God doesn't twist our arms or force us. God doesn't make us do anything. God does tell us it won't always be easy.

But God does call us, and tells us to look up! See what God sees! God sees the potential. God sees the abundance. The harvest is plentiful.

Pray the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers into his harvest fields.  
Amen.

