

“Pray Earnestly to the Lord of the Harvest”

SERMON TEXT: Matthew 9:35-38 (Luke 10:1-20)

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Dearly beloved of God, whom the Holy Spirit has called to faith through the Gospel: grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Harvest who sends us forth in His name to labour in His field, sowing His Word of Promise and reaping its good yield, to God's glory alone. Amen.

Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples in very clear and certain terms that the Word of God's promised pardon and restoration, the good news of the Kingdom of God, which was to be cast and sown as seed is likewise scattered throughout a field, would produce a harvest from among its hearers. Jesus then said to His apostles, those whom He sent forth in His name, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.” He said that the harvest was great; He said that the labourers were few. The proclamation of the Gospel— the message of God's Messiah— would work its way from the witness of John in the Judaeian wilderness to the centre of Jewish worship in Jerusalem to the centres of Gentile worldly wisdom and, eventually, to the very ends of the earth itself. Yes, as the Word was sown, so too a harvest was soon to be reaped. Yet, labourers were to be called upon to sow and to reap. So, it is the Lord of the Harvest who is to be called upon to Call to His fields those who are to labour in them. Indeed, to this end, Jesus instructed His disciples to pray. So too, as Jesus' disciples today, His instruction is for us to pray as well— after all, before us is the field of harvest

where the seed has already been scattered by those who've gone out to labour before us! So, we too are to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to continue to send out labourers into His harvest. So, without question, we have our Lord's own clear instruction that this is according to God's will and that we should pray for it. So then, only one question remains: Since Jesus Himself has told us to pray for this very thing, do we doubt that God will answer such a prayer?

Beloved in the Lord, the answer to the aforementioned question is found within the text of our Gospel lesson. Indeed, immediately after instructing His apostles to pray that God would send out more labourers, Jesus then immediately sends the Twelve: Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother, John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Him. Our Lord sent these twelve to work in those fields of faith that were ripe for harvest. Jesus said to His apostles, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest." These words from our Lord are not only recorded in St. Matthew's Gospel, as you have heard them read to you, but also in St. Luke's Gospel. Now, while St. Luke speaks of the sending of the Twelve, he also tells of the sending of the Seventy or Seventy-Two. Whereas St. Matthew appends our Lord's words about the harvest to the sending of the Twelve, St. Luke includes these words to the sending of the others. Indeed, it is very likely that our Lord, in fact, said to the second group what He had already said to the first: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the

Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.” However, here, in St. Luke’s Gospel, we also hear these words, as they were recorded for us: “Go your way; behold, I am sending you out...” Yes, after telling them to pray to the Lord of the Harvest for more labourers, He then sends them out to labour, saying, “Go your way; behold, I am sending you out...” “Go,” He said. He answered their prayer as He had answered the prayers of the Twelve. He answered them by sending them out to answer the need for labour. By this, He identifies *Himself* as the “Lord of the Harvest.” So, brothers and sisters, we mustn’t make the mistake of thinking that the harvest is a product of happenstance, out of God’s control, and left to our labour (as if it were separate from the Lord’s call to work His harvest). No, we mustn’t get the impression that the harvest is up to us. We are speaking about the *Lord’s* harvest and the *Lord’s* labourers. It is He who sends whomever He chooses to work in His fields to sow or to reap. The harvest is *His*. The labourers are *His*. The results are *His* and *His* alone. If He desires to call more of His own to work within any particular portion of His harvest field, then He calls His labourers to that portion to put their hand to plough or to pluck. Yes, there *is* a Lord over the Harvest. Yes, there *is* a Lord of the labourers. After all, when it comes to His kingdom and His promises, Jesus *is* and *remains* Lord over all. He will not leave anything to chance. Yes, He uses means to manifest His mission; however, He remains the One who is, at the heart of it all, both the gift and the giver. So, while we are called to labour and to pray for more labourers, the truth remains that, even though we are to work as if it all depended upon us, we rest in knowledge that there *is* a Lord of the Harvest— and that lord is Jesus Christ! We, as workers, are merely the means by which the Word is spread, as seed

which is cast, or the means by which the harvest of faith is to be brought to the storehouse, as sheaves from the field. Jesus would have us pray to undo any uncertainty as we come to recognize that the harvest is *His* harvest.

In His Church, the Lord has ordained that His Word and Sacraments are to be administered by means of the Office that He Himself established. He exercises His lordship over His harvest field by means which are meant to communicate His sure Word of Promise in a way that works to eliminate doubt. He does this by using objective and external means to convey His grace to us. He does not leave us to look inward, to turn to that which is subjective, but He calls us to look outside of ourselves. For example, as you have all witnessed today, Jesus has given us Holy Baptism, whereby water that is physically poured over one's head, as one is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is connected to the promise that we are thus connected to Christ's death and resurrection, cleansed by Him, and cloaked in His righteousness. There need not be any doubt or uncertainty. No one needs to wonder whether they are truly baptized or not, once it has taken place. All the promises of Baptism are given in Baptism and there can be no doubt that those promises—the promises made to Aria just moments ago—are also for you since you too were baptized into Christ. God's name was placed upon her as He claimed her for His own. So too with you. Holy Baptism isn't about her commitment, or your commitment, to Him. It is about His commitment. It is His Word to us through His visibly sacramental means of communicating such grace. So too, Jesus has given us the Sacrament of the Altar, whereby bread and wine that are physically received in the mouth, along with Christ's own Words of Institution—which

poured forth from His mouth and, now, through the mouths of pastors— tell us that we receive His true body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. There need not be any doubt or uncertainty. No one needs to wonder if their sins are truly forgiven after receiving the Lord's Supper. All the promises of the Lord's Supper are given in Jesus' true body and blood and there can be no doubt that these promises are for you since you yourself receive Jesus' body and blood. So too it is with those who labour for you as you labour in His harvest. They are given to you to give you His gift of Himself, according to His Word, so that there need not be any doubt or uncertainty. They labour as He would have them labour, where and when He wills— for He is the Lord of the Harvest!

Brothers and sisters, uncertainty and doubt enter in when people turn to any other means than those ordained by God. For example, when one is *not* baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” or when an element other than water is used, certainty is lost because Jesus' lordship is either ignored or usurped. So, for example, when people baptize “in the name of the Creator, Liberator, and Sustainer,” or use rose petals instead of water (seriously, I'm not making this up), there can be no assurance that such means communicate the grace of God because they are not in accord with the Word of God. When wine and bread are replaced by Coca-Cola and Doritos (again, I'm not making this up), there is no certainty that Christ's body and blood have been distributed by such illicit and illegitimate means. So too, when God's Word of Holy Absolution is not pronounced by one who is sent by the Lord of the Harvest to take up such a task, there is doubt where and when there should never be doubt. After all, the Lord of the Harvest properly Calls these labourers to go into His harvest to do the work

that He gives to them to do, under His authority. This is why it is said of these labourers, those who Jesus Calls and sends into His harvest for this work, “The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” Pray, therefore, for these means by which God’s work is to be done. Do so for the sake of the world and for the sake of one another.

The Lord of the Harvest sends His labourers into His harvest. It is He who sends whomever He chooses to work in *His* fields to sow or to reap. The harvest is *His*. The labourers are *His*. The results are *His* and *His* alone. We pray that He would send them, and He answers our prayer before it is even uttered. God gives His sure and certain gifts through His labourers so that you can be sure and certain that you have received and will continue to receive what God has promised: the forgiveness of sins. Yes, we pray that He would send them and that He would send us also, and, indeed, He answers our prayer before it is even uttered. The Lord of the Harvest has given you His Word, by the means He has ordained, so as to lead, guide, and keep you in His truth, unto Life everlasting, as you too earnestly go forth to tell of His truth, for His harvest is truly plentiful. In His name: Amen.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Amen.