

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

*Open my eyes that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.*

*Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.*

*Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine!*

This classic hymn is the theme of our lectionary series in the month of June: Open Our Eyes. This morning, the text from the Gospel of Matthew invites us to open our eyes and see the people... the people in our communities in need of healing, in need of comfort, in need of the life giving and life affirming power that comes in knowing and experiencing Jesus Christ.

The text informs us that when Jesus “saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless (Matthew 9:36, NRSV).” As it was then, so it is today. In just the first five and a half months of 2020 just in our area alone, we have experienced tornadoes, a virus that has sent us into isolation and closed our churches to worship gatherings as a good faith precaution in order that we may do no harm to the most vulnerable, an economy that has tanked in ways that compare to the Great Depression, we have seen tensions boil over as the demon of racial prejudice, emboldened in this political

environment, rears its ugly head. And that's the situation for those of us who have lived comfortably in our community. The situation for our brothers and sisters who live on the margins has been even more profound as a sense of hopelessness is intensified by all that is going on in our world today.

When Jesus saw the people, he had compassion for them. He used his power to heal the sick, bring sight to the blind, and bring justice to the oppressed as he gave the people a glimpse of the kingdom of God. But before he could do that, he saw the people.

He. Saw. Them.

That means that he was close enough to see them and to experience their presence. He was close enough to reach out and touch them. He was out among them, not barricaded behind walls and fences. As the people of Pentecost, we need to get out from behind the walls and into the community around us so that we can see the people as well. The people who need to know the love and saving grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When Jesus saw the people, we know that he was engaged with them because the verse tells us that he had compassion for them. His compassion led to an active engagement with them, it wasn't just some disembodied, theoretical exercise that cared in the abstract or that just saw problems needing solutions. When Jesus saw the people, when he saw the crowds, his compassion for them took the immediate shape of active engagement with the people. He touched them. Where they were hurting, Jesus provided healing. Where there was sadness, he brought joy. Where there was sorrow and despair, he brought hope.

Jesus had compassion because he saw the people, When he really and truly saw the people around him, compassion was the result, the reaction. As followers of Christ, we are invited to see the people as well. But to really see the

people, we need to be ready to engage them. We need to be ready to interact with them, We need to open our eyes that we may see, truly see, our brothers and sisters, not to judge them or categorize them, but to see them as people worthy of compassion and care for all of whom are made in the image of God. All of whom contain a bit of that image of God in them... if we only look hard enough to see it, to see them as God sees them, as beloved children.

For God so loved the world...

For God so *loves* the world...

When we take on this God vision and see as God sees, we might just see that the people around us are indeed harassed and helpless, suffering from the lack of a savior. All of us suffering in need of a savior. But we won't know that is what we will see until we look. Sure, we can assume, but what do we see?

Perhaps it would be helpful to stand in the place of the other, the outsider, the outcast, for a moment. To consider what it means, what it feels like to be seen, as opposed to the times when we felt overlooked or ignored and pigeonholed. To know that someone has seen the real self, hidden underneath and still manages to love and accept us. What a profound difference that makes in our lives, in our hearts, in our self- image. Can we do less when we seek to engage the community around us?

Because he sees and has compassion, because he knows that it is God's will that all be gathered into the loving arms of grace, Jesus calls the twelve. Pause a moment here, something significant is going on. According to Matthew anyway, Jesus calls the twelve in order for them to be those laborers that are so few. The community isn't called together for their own sake. The twelve aren't called in order to tend to their own souls, to make sure they are right with God. No, they are called to go out, to be the church that sees the crowds. That engages with the crowds. That gets to know the crowds by listening to their

stories, to hear their experiences, to understand their joys, their concerns, their hopes, and their fears.

But we must seek to see them first. Not come to them with a pre-packaged “solution” to what we have perceived to be their problem. But see them, truly see them for who they are. We don’t come to our neighbors because we want to fix them, or threaten them, or chastise them. We come to see them. We don’t rely on our theology, on our preferences for worship and our language for prayer. We come truly empty handed so that we may see our neighbors without the filters.

Is this easy? Is it just a matter of saying that’s what I’m going to do? Is it just flipping a switch to turn off our prejudice? Of course not. But we try again and again to see those that surround us. Perhaps we will see them as harassed and helpless, but harassed by whom and helpless in front of what? And maybe, just maybe, we will see them as resources of strength and grace that cause us to be amazed and to give the God they may not know thanks for the blessing of seeing them. What is most likely is that if we look long enough we’ll see ourselves in them. We are like them, and they are like us in the ways that really matter. And that can be an occasion of praise.

Open my eyes, illumine me. Spirit divine.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.