

Responding in Community

Matthew 9:35– 10:8

People Figures

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Jesus's Disciples

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Today's Bible Reading

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Additional Bible Readings

Genesis 18:1–15

Psalms 116:1–2, 12–19

Romans 5:1–8

God of compassion and mercy, strengthen our resolve to say yes to your call to

love as you have loved us. Send us from relationships of care and compassion to all who live in need, following the example of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Matthew's gospel draws attention to Jesus' life and ministry as it sits within the tradition of the Hebrew scriptures. Matthew 9:35 —10:8 (9–23) is this example. The report that Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion for them because they are "like sheep without a shepherd" echoes Moses' thoughts regarding the people of Israel just before his death (Numbers 27:15–19). Moses commissions Joshua to carry on the work; similarly, Jesus, seeing the "shepherd-less," sends out his disciples to carry on his ministry.

With urgency, Jesus speaks of the "harvest," the coming of God's reign. Having seen how many are in need of the liberating compassion of God, all other work seems superfluous to that of proclaiming the good news to "the lost sheep of Israel." Twelve disciples (recalling the twelve tribes of Israel, whose foundation we recall later in the season) are named as apostles and are sent. Still, it is important to note they weren't the only disciples and followers of Jesus, and we are invited to add our own names as those whom Jesus calls and sends.

The extension of compassion to others was considered a serious flaw in one's character in the Greco-Roman world. Greek culture thought compassion to be an unenlightened human weakness. The Romans believed it destroyed one's dignity, so Jesus' revelation that God's realm is one of generosity and grace was dangerous on many levels. The apostles entrusted to this task are asked to risk their safety and minister boldly. They must depend entirely on God for all their needs. Many whom the disciples encounter

will be unreceptive, and Jesus' instructions regarding these people seem harsh. However, this was seen as urgent work and the disciples were urged to go where the likelihood of acceptance was greatest.

Being a disciple does not insulate people and communities of faith from hard times, and the gospel writer reassures the reader that God is a guiding and sustaining presence even in those times.