

Good News!
Matthew 9:35 – 38

The Harvest Is Plentiful, the Laborers Few

35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Do you keep up with the news about the royal family of England? I'm amazed at how much there is to read and write about them. Some magazines have something new about the royal family almost every week. Most of this news has nothing to do with the facts because tabloid writers aren't very interested in facts. Rather, they gather weekly and discuss, "We have to find another love scandal? No, we just had that last year. Maybe something about the secret dealings with Saudi Arabia? No, that's a hornet's nest! We can't afford that. No, let's fabricate a juicy statement from Prince Harry and his dispute with his father, the king. Of course, these tabloid writers have a problem. They have to write something about the royal family week after week. And they know that sensationalism brings in a lot of money. You can make a lot of money that way!

What about Jesus? Did he spend years thinking about founding a world religion? He was 30 when He began preaching, healing the sick, and gathering His disciples. The Gospels say very little about the years before He turned 30. What do you think Jesus did for those 30 years? Did He think about how He would start the next great world religion? Did He desperately want to become the most famous person on earth by having himself nailed to a cross? From our sermon text today, we get a very small insight into what drove Jesus. Not sensationalism, nor the desire to make a lot of money or become famous. No, the whole time He was concerned for the way people were cut off and separated from God. It moved Him deeply! Or as the Greek word expresses it: It struck Him to his very core. He was swept away with horror and compassion. What bothered Him so much was the miserable condition of the people living here on earth without God. Their hopeless attempts to find God and impress God with good works moved him to tears. The many ways they tried to be happy, too: some through money, others through love... But always the same suffering, the same disappointments, the same ruins of human existence. And Jesus wept over it. What would Jesus say if He saw us today? What if He looked into your heart and mine? Would He also cry then? Perhaps Jesus is also saying: It pains me so much to see how rich and well-fed people are on the one hand... and how bitterly poor they truly are at heart. Some are truly exhausted and feel only sorry for themselves. That's why they prefer to quarrel with one another rather than experience true joy. There is no giving in, no renunciation – a culture of hatred. What a pity! Then as now, Jesus says the following: The kingdom of heaven must belong to my people! Jesus doesn't just watch!...He doesn't just cry, He doesn't just lament...The deep sorrow for His people leads Him to come to us as God and man.

And that's precisely why Jesus went up and down the land, proclaiming the Good News of God to people and healing people of their many illnesses. The Good News--oh, how different this news is from the fabricated news described above from the tabloids! Even if those news reports are good, they never truly make us happy. No news from this world can truly make us happy. Not even when I hear that I've won the lottery! We humans only become joyful when the boundaries between this world and the next are broken down, when we hear God's Word and can understand what God intends for us. That is Good News! That God cares about us, that He takes us seriously, that He is sad when we sin and happy when a sinner repents—that is Good News. When God goes to such lengths that He sends us His Son so that we will not be lost—that is Good News. Can we see how God works in our world through Jesus? Can we even comprehend that anymore?

Sometimes, we feel very alone. We think we have to do everything on our own so that God is pleased with us. However, since we can never do that, we are constantly disappointed and sad. So, we are often like a small leaf in a stream, involuntarily carried back and forth by the currents of time, depending on how we feel at the time. Many have completely given up on believing in God's love and grace. They believe it is purely coincidental if God is well-disposed towards them or not. What misery! Such people should never be left alone in their misguided thoughts. There is a way to God, and God is truly with us! He loves us and desires our salvation.

As an example, let's look at a special bridge in Dresden. This bridge is a 3,500-ton steel structure with a span of 141.5 meters. It spans the Elbe and connects Loschwitz with Blasewitz. The special thing about this bridge is that it didn't

require any river piers, but only two piers on each bank. It was inaugurated in 1893 and was considered a technical marvel at the time. Because it was painted blue, it was soon called "the Blue Wonder."

The Blue Wonder can help us understand how the Kingdom of Heaven comes to us. First, there are two banks that are separated from each other. There is no way back or forth. In a figurative sense, one bank is God's side, and the other bank is the side of those who live without God and therefore must suffer death, sin, and the devil. When God creates a bridge from his eternal kingdom to sinful man, He has connected two things that don't really belong together. Yet He did it! That's a miracle! He did it through Jesus. That's a miracle. But as is the case with many miracles, people can't believe it. God becomes man and comes to us? That isn't possible! Therefore, people say, Jesus can't be God and God has never come to us. Jesus didn't rise from the dead or pay for our sins. But He did! He is just like the Blue Wonder in Dresden. On one side, completely connected to God. On the other side, completely connected to mankind! From God to mankind—from mankind to God. He is completely God—one pillar on God's side, and He is completely human—the other pillar on ours. And He alone is the bridge that spans both shores, so that people no longer have to taste death, sin, and the devil, but can cross over. He is the only way from God and to God. The vale of tears existed back then – Jesus clearly identified it. And the vale of tears exists today – we only need to pay attention to ourselves and listen to all the complaining we do. But there is a bridge over all of this – Jesus Christ. In Him and through Him there is a new way of life: And this bridge is a solid path we can walk on. No one likes to walk on a bridge that sways back and forth...or that perhaps has a large warning sign...ATTENTION DANGER, NO ENTRY. But God's bridge is completely solid and completely safe. In His path to mankind, Jesus left nothing out. He even provided the structure between the two pillars. This structure is the way Jesus Christ comes to us....and for that, Jesus uses ordinary material made of flesh and blood...He uses apostles and prophets. They are ordinary people, like you and me. The only thing that is special about these people is that they have connected with Jesus. Jesus Himself called them and appointed them for this important task. Jesus also gives us Holy Communion and Baptism, so that we can trust and walk on the solid foundation of God's promises. And so, for thousands of years, God's bridge has stood firmly and securely in its place.....Just as the bridge in Dresden was the only bridge in Dresden to survive the war, so the Church also survives all of Satan's attacks on the Church.

Of course, miracles have the tendency to become part of everyday life, to be taken for granted and overlooked. But miracles are and remain miracles, even if we don't notice them – Jesus wants to make us aware of them and remind us again and again and wants our eyes to be open to his cause.

So, perhaps we are now saying: If only Jesus were as evident and tangible as He was back then! Is there no way for the Kingdom of Heaven to come to us and to people today? Let us recall our sermon text once again. Jesus gives His disciples an example. And then He spoke of what he saw – he saw a great harvest. In the midst of the vale of tears, He saw something ripening. But then came the next shock: He saw only a few who could reap. He saw few who would share the Gospel with people so that healings would occur. And then He said: Ask! Start praying. Pray to God. Call out to God! Cry out your need to HIM. It is not the fire that burns within us that counts, but God Himself wants to give the fire of His Holy Spirit. But we should ask for it. Jesus wants us to open our eyes so we can see what's happening around us...do you see the harvest is ripe? Can we also see with the eyes of Jesus? Can we see the people around us with the eyes of Jesus? That doesn't just mean how they constantly irritate us or are even a burden, but as those who need God. Can we see them in such a way that their suffering touches us, as if their suffering were also our suffering? So that something in our innermost being changes...We have God's bridge, we are completely safe there. But we shouldn't just rejoice in the bridge we're standing on; we should open our eyes to what's outside...not resignedly, but with the eyes of Jesus...eyes that have compassion like a mother has compassion for her children.

Something else about the famous Elbe Bridge in Dresden...The Blue Wonder consists of many, many individual parts held together by many, many rivets. When you hold such a rivet in your hand, it's clear to everyone that something like that won't build a bridge. It's just a rivet! It's the same with us Christians. Every single Christian is simply a rivet! But together we are part of the bridge--held together by God's Word and Sacrament. Held together with the many other rivets, such a rivet is strong. Isn't that a unique encouragement to us – Yes, Jesus uses us, even though we are rivets!

I would like to conclude with a wish: I wish you – me – us – a miracle. The miracle doesn't have to be blue. But it should bear the name and signature of Jesus. And perhaps we need an additional miracle, namely, that we recognize what HE is doing as such – then we will testify that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near today, too.

Amen.