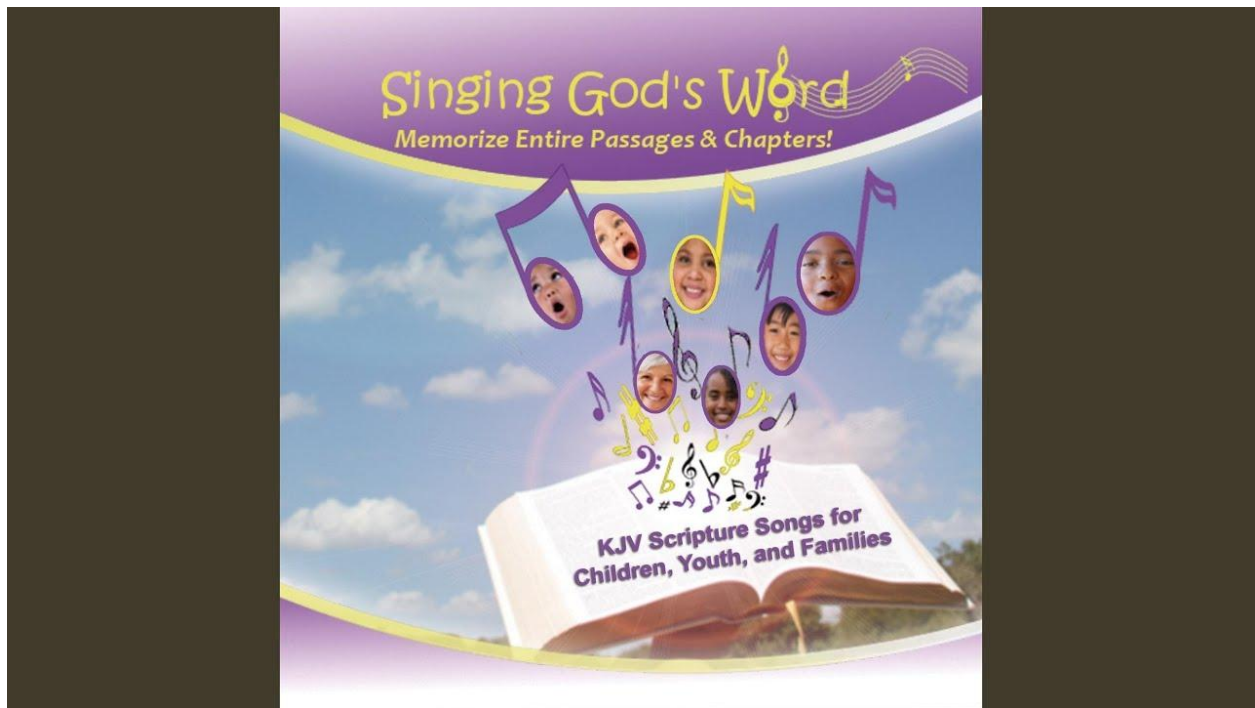


Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6)  
June 14, 2026  
Matthew 9:35-10:8, (9-23)





Church membership is shrinking across mainline protestant denominations. Have you checked out [military.com](http://military.com) of late? We are now 'other' according to our *War Department Head*.

The reported number of U.S. adults who claim to be religiously unaffiliated is **growing rapidly**. Faced with these statistics, many within the church throw up their hands and wonder what will become of the church.

Yet, research shows that while many are done with the institution of the church, they are not done with spirituality. Many believe in a higher power. Some are seeking ways to be grounded in something larger than themselves. In a world where so many are starving, where financial stability is increasingly hard to find, where gun violence and mass shootings are ever more frequent, where war rages around the world, and where political discourse is increasingly divisive, people remain hungry for good news.

It appears that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Jesus looked out on the crowds and saw a group of people who were tired and overwhelmed, harassed and helpless. They, too, faced a world where political violence was at a high, where people could be killed because they disagreed with the powers that be, where families struggled to put food on the table, where religious leaders seemed to champion rules over people, and the division between the haves and have-nots was increasingly great.

The people around Jesus yearned for good news. They hoped for the end of suffering from disease and physical impairment. They dreamed of a world that was just. They grasped at the hope that all could be fed. Jesus's message was compelling, and so they crowded around him. As Jesus notes in Matthew 9:35-10:8, "The harvest is plentiful ..." (v. 37).

But, he continues, "the laborers are few" (v. 37). It was not a lack of people who yearned for the good news; it was a lack of people to do the work of proclamation and healing in a hurting world. And it is not a lack of people seeking some hope and good news today. Jesus sent his disciples out, out of their comfort zone, out of the safety of their community, out among the crowds.

I wonder how many of our churches still hope that if they build it, people will come? They remain within the walls and the traditions of the church. They remain in their comfort zone and hope for someone who will shepherd them in comfort.

Jesus shifts how the disciples see their interactions with others. Jesus tells them, “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:38). Instead of simply hoping for more people to show up and join their community, he urges them to ask to be sent out into other communities to spread the word and build community there.

Jesus doesn't exactly paint an easy picture of the task before them. Taking the message out into the world is hard. People may not be receptive. They may argue or refuse to listen. They bring pre-conceived notions into the conversation.

While some may welcome the disciples, others will refuse them. While some may listen, others may persecute them. They may find themselves up against the kings of this world who rail against the ways of the kingdom of God. Jesus's advice is not to compel people by force, but to speak to those who will listen and shake the dust off their feet as they walk away from those who are unwilling to hear.

He tells them to proclaim that the kingdom is near and heal and cure. For him, this healing and curing is likely all about bringing peace and well-being, a reconciliation of people to their communities, the work of justice, and building a beloved community.

Today, the church finds itself in a similar situation. As the culture has grown wary of the church, and its institutional problems and a message of intolerance has grown louder, less trust is placed in the church. When Christians go out to spread a gospel of love and healing of community, we meet resistance. We may even find resistance from the political system that seeks to silence any views that challenge existing power structures.

Yet we would still be wise to remember Jesus's advice. Ask not when all the people will join us, but ask to be messengers of grace among the world. Do not enforce your belief with cruelty or hatred, but share among those who will listen. Shake the dust off your feet when someone will not welcome you or agree with you. Trust the process. We are simply laborers for one who has seeded the soil well.

Questions for reflection on Matthew 9:35-10:8, (9-23)

1. Who are the harassed and helpless in today's society? How do we move out of our church communities and into those communities to proclaim the good news and bring them into a reconciled community? How does this type of healing ministry help bring about the kingdom?
2. What is the hardest or most frightening part about sharing the gospel? Do you find it easy to talk about your faith with others outside the church? Are there places where you **try not to let people know about your church affiliation? Why?**
3. Consider those who might have (or do) push back against the teachings of Jesus from a religious viewpoint. How do we proclaim the good news of the gospel in a world that hears a much different message from political and church leaders in the media?