

Good for What Ails Us Matthew 9:35-10:8

Have you ever heard the phrase, “good for what ails you”? It’s a catch-all phrase to describe a supposed cure that some conman has conjured up. The classic, all-purpose “good for what ails you” remedy for nearly every condition was a table-spoonful of castor oil. Did some of you ever suffer through that treatment?

In working on this message this morning I “googled” the phrase “good for what ails you” and the results were – interesting. Some sites say that humor is “good for what ails you”. Another site featured a jazz song with the lyric, “love is good for anything that ails you.”

Still another site states that Siberian ginseng and Yemeni honey are really good for you, as is massage therapy, owning a pet, and aromatherapy. My favorite, though, among all of the old creams, salves, and liniments used a century ago was this one: Brame’s Pain Knocker. And I wouldn’t doubt it. Here are some of the ingredients: 1.5% tincture of opium, 1.5% chloroform, 88% alcohol!

Seriously, what does ail us? What ails this world in which we live? In our gospel reading this morning Jesus is in towns and villages, teaching, preaching, and healing. Beyond the physical ailments he sees, he noticed that people are harassed, confused, and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, much like the symptoms that fit our world today

The disease of our day often is the *disease* we experience in life which then negatively affects all our other relationships, including the relationship with God. And when that happens, the devil roars with delight.

In this post-modern world everything is presented as being relative, where all values are neutral, and no absolute truth can be known with certainty. Confusion and instability seem to reign supreme, and we look for a quick fix from one self-help guru with a new, *old* idea, to the next. But we never find lasting peace and wholeness and a solid place upon which to build our lives and our future.

Everywhere we turn we are confronted with a society and lives full of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual sickness. What effect does this have on us? Does it suck us in? Does it fill us with fear or loathing? Or does the sight of the crowd, harassed and helpless like sheep, fill us with compassion, as it did Jesus? How do we as Christians respond?

Let’s be clear about this: **Jesus wasn’t “sorry” for the crowd.** The Greek word used in verse 36 — *splangnistheis* — means that Jesus was filled with a gut-wrenching compassion that resulted in words and deeds. This gut-wrenching compassion is what led Jesus to the cross to die for the crowd, for the world, for you, for me, while we were yet helpless and harassed, confused and lost.

Jesus came with the remedy for what ails the world — the good news of the reign of God’s love, come to earth in him. The love of God has broken into our world in a radically new and paradoxically powerful way, bringing life, health, wholeness, and cleansing through the forgiveness of sins.

Part of the paradox of the good news is that Jesus’ followers — formerly harassed and panicked sheep without a shepherd themselves — are integral to God’s remedy. We who have been marked with the cross of Christ forever in the waters of baptism, are

claimed, gathered, and sent by God's goodness for the sake of the world because "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37b).

There are harassed and helpless people out there, around the corner from where we live, working in the same office as us, living across the street, right next door — perhaps even in the same house with us. Lost sheep without a shepherd, ready to hear the good news.

Who is caring for them? Who will have compassion on them? The harvest *is* plentiful — it is the laborers who are few. That's why Jesus told his disciples then and tells us today to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to bring in the harvest. Prayer is the first step; it is not a substitute for work, but the work will not be done without prayer. So we pray and work.

I notice that right after Jesus tells his disciples to pray that God would send out laborers into the harvest, he sends them out as the answer to that prayer. The principle at work here is what the reformer Martin Luther taught in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer: whenever we pray that God would do something, we first of all pray that God would begin with us.

We are Christ's hands and feet, now, today, in our world. We are part of God's answer to the prayer for laborers to bring in the harvest. The one who prays, does what God wants done, and the one who prays is ready to go where where God sends.

There's simply no escaping it: like the disciples before us, **we are an integral part of God's remedy for what ails the world.** Ordinary people like you and me are called by God for his extraordinary work in the world.

Jesus' ministry is also ours: to do no harm, but to embody in our words and actions and attitudes God's remedy that is good for what ails the world. Where there is brokenness, let us bring reconciliation through the amazing power of the forgiveness of sins, revealed at the cross of Christ.

When people feel excluded and ostracized, let us bring the cleansing touch of inclusion and welcome in Jesus' name. Where life is overshadowed by the fear of death, let us bring hope by proclaiming Christ's resurrection.

Wherever we find evil at work, whether at home, in the church, at school, at work, in society in general or whether half-way around the globe, let us oppose it with all our might in Jesus' name.

His gut-wrenching compassion compels us to do so - so that others may be freed from bondage to falsehood and injustice. The compassion of the Triune God compels us so that the harassed and helpless of this world might come to know Jesus as we have come to know him: God's very personal remedy for what ails the world. Amen.