



June 13/14/15, 2026 – 3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: We Are Claimed by Christ: to live carefree lives, to witness confidently

Sermon Text: Matthew 9: 35 – 10:8

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on 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 workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." 10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,^[a] drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Dear fellow Christian believers, called to fight the good fight of faith,

Imagine being on vacation. Sounds nice, doesn't it? And when you come back, you discover unwelcomed guests – those of the 6 and 8-legged kind all over your kitchen. Would you stand for that and let them live in peace? I doubt it. How long would it take for you to call the Orkin man? Not long in my house. We don't like it when insects or other rodents invade our personal space. And yet when we stop to think about it, we just might be the intruders. I mean all of us build our homes and apartments on the top of natural habitats of countless animal and insect species. All year long we battle cobwebs, hornets' nests, along with the great state bird of Minnesota, the mosquito. Some of us have even moved to Minnesota because we love the great outdoors, as long as it stays way outdoors.

Mankind and nature have been locked in this epic battle pretty much since time began. But, my Christian brothers and sisters, there's an even bigger war being waged every day, with the eternal stakes of heaven and hell hanging in the balance. And it involves our eternal souls. The Bible puts this war on our radar screens as the cosmic struggle between good and evil, between heaven and earth, between God and Satan. If you look around, it doesn't seem like we're in much danger. But, there's can be no doubt.

Our souls hang in the balance. Ponder this Bible fact: how valuable your soul must be -- for Satan to tirelessly pursue it, and the King to lay down his own life for it. Stunning, really. Both God and Satan lay claim to this world and to our souls, but only one of these claims is legit. Today, in our sermon reading from Matthew chapters 9 and 10, Jesus gives this needed reminder: His heavenly father is the master of the harvest and commander of heaven's forces. He calls us as His baptized people, his warriors to join the battle against Satan and fight the good fight of faith. As we review the words of Matthew today, we learn that we are claimed by Christ! Christ has claimed us so we may live care-free lives. Christ has claimed us so that we may witness confidently for Him.

What would it be like to wake up and live in Iran or even Ukraine? Can you imagine sending your kids off to their cousin's house across town and not know for sure if they'd make it there safe or even if we'd make it home from work at night. We tend to take so much for granted in this country as we live in relative safety. Maybe that's why many don't sense this dangerous spiritual war raging around us. But let's not fool ourselves -- even here in New Ulm, we're living in a war zone. But because Christ has claimed us, we can live care-free life. What I mean is that we don't need to obsessively worry and become paralyzed with fear while the battle rages on. Our Savior, our champion Jesus is right here, right now. Our reading reminds us: ***Jesus has compassion on us – always.***

The Bible calls Satan the “**Prince of this world**” (John 12:30) because he holds powerful influence over people. He works in concert with the sinful nature, the traitor within each one of us that wants us to run away from God instead of run to him. Jesus spent a major part of his ministry combating the consequences of sin, as he often healed them of their diseases. And think of how long some of them endured illness. Two thousand years ago people weren't able to purchase over-the-counter medication at Walgreens or have heart surgery or a knee replacement. Jesus gave healing and He gave hope. We also see Jesus driving out demons and raising the dead. When we read the Gospels, no matter what Satan threw at him, we never see Jesus shrugging his shoulders saying, “I can't help you today” or, “let's make an appointment next month.” Rather, we see Jesus always working late into the evening when he was tired and hungry. He never stopped caring – then or now.

But as great as Jesus' victories over sickness were, his greatest Gospel victories were when he forgave people their sins. When four men tore through the roof and lowered their paralyzed friend in front of Jesus, what were the first words out of his mouth? Not, “Get up and walk,” but “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” In our reading, Matthew tells us the people “***were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.***” It's not like they didn't have spiritual leaders. But because the Pharisees and teachers of the law thought they were better than anyone else, they looked down on others. If you didn't measure up to their standards, they crushed any hope in you of finding peace with God. And so the people were literally sitting ducks for the Devil. Some time ago, I saw baby ducks sitting along the highway without their mother. It was sad – one of the babies had already been crushed, with the rest of them

huddled around him as cars and semis whizzed around. You wonder why they didn't get off the road, get out of danger, but they were too confused to find their own way to safety. In the same way, God's people are harassed when they are told constantly what they must do, instead of in Christ what God has done for them. They are harassed when they compare themselves to other "perfect" Christians, and realize how messed up their own lives are. Then the devil piles on the guilt so heavy that they don't even try to move out of temptation's way anymore.

I doubt anyone stopped their car to help those baby ducks get out of harm's way. But our sermon reading tells us that when Jesus saw the crowds, he stopped and had compassion on them. That's exactly why the Son of God came into our world. He took our place on the cross and let the Heavenly Father run over him with his 18-wheeler of justice. As our Risen Shepherd, Jesus feeds our faith every time we receive his body and blood. His Word reminds us that as many times as we have failed in our fight against evil, Jesus has won every battle and now we belong to him. Because of Jesus, we are set free from the curse of sin. Because of Jesus, we have power to resist temptation. Because of Jesus, we lead care-free lives as we cast every care upon Him because He cares for us.

So how has the turf war been going with your soul this week? Whose influence have you sensed more this week – the devil or Jesus? Don't you wish the Christian calm we have right now would last all week? But, through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit gives us God's love in Christ. Think how many are missing out on Jesus and His love. The devil doesn't just harass the alcoholics, the abusers, the chronically unemployed, but also the wealthy, the self-sufficient who seem to enjoy the best of what this world offers. How much sympathy do we have for them? Are we willing to let them remain in harm's way? What are we willing to do in order to rescue them? Dear friends, Jesus set us free from sin and the devil for a reason – not so that we could sit on our hands and watch the rest of the world go to hell in a handbasket. Rather, Jesus has claimed us so that we may witness Him with confidence to others.

In our sermon reading, Jesus makes this surprising observation: **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."** That was true 2,000 years ago, when there were only a dozen apostles. And it's true today in Brown County, where there are dozens of churches. As many as Jesus sets free from Satan, there are many more still caught in his evil grip. And there are fewer people brave enough to talk about the Savior. So Jesus tells us, **"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."** Jesus isn't just talking about those enrolled at MLC or Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He's talking about us, isn't he? What army sends only its officers into battle? And yet, why is it that in the church we often leave these spiritual battles to our pastors, teachers, or staff ministers? Is it because we don't feel properly trained? Then, look at the 12 disciples – none of them were ministry school-educated, and none of them were perfect. They all had baggage. Think of shoot-first, ask questions later Peter. There's James and John who had some serious anger management issues. Think of doubting Thomas, Simon the terrorist, or even Matthew who spent his life cheating others as a tax collector. They weren't the sharpest knives in drawer. I doubt

we'd pick any of them to be on our ministry team. But, Jesus did. He called them in Grace to wage war on the forces of evil. And He equipped them in Grace for battle. He gave them this saving message: ***The kingdom of heaven has come near.*** Heaven and the message of Jesus Christ are as near as an open Bible, an open seat in church, an open invitation to join us next Sunday to hear a sermon that talks about what Jesus has done for us.

Jesus still gives us real spiritual power to set others free from Satan's grip. It's through a simple message we share with others – friends, family, neighbors and co-workers. All of us can witness and simply tell what Jesus has done for us. Even a small child can unleash this power by saying: Jesus loves you.

Whenever I think it's too hard to be a witness, I think of the disciples. Almost all of them died for witnessing their faith. Today, we don't face that danger. Instead, the danger we most often face is simply not caring. That is apathy. Apathy says: "I know God's Word, but I don't feel like hearing or following it today." Apathy says: "Church is optional". I know what apathy is because I've lived it too many times especially when it comes to witnessing for Christ, haven't you? Yes, we have apathy to deal with along with the apathy of others. Dear friends, Jesus tells us to pray for more workers, but he also wants us to pray for ourselves. When we do, He will open our eyes to see how great the harvest is, and replace our apathy with His passion.

Just as the government has the right to send troops into battle, so also Jesus has every right to send us to fight the good fight of faith. None of us are weekend warriors, nor is our tour of duty limited. Instead, our struggle versus evil goes on every day. When we're tempted to give up, remember we are claimed by Christ and the truth of Scripture: God gives us the victory through our LORD Jesus Christ. Amen.