

**Follow: Learning from Matthew to Live Like Jesus**  
Faith UMC Lent Bible Study, 2025  
Week 2

Matthew 9:35-10:8

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. <sup>36</sup>When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; <sup>38</sup>therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. <sup>2</sup>These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; <sup>3</sup>Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup>Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup>but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." <sup>8</sup>Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

**Compassion for Humanity**

There's a quote attributed to Ghandi. "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." I would add, "Here, here! Preach on, Ghandi." Except there's no record of Ghandi ever saying those exact words.

Instead, there's a conversation between Ghandi and the missionary E. Stanley Jones. Jones was a Methodist preacher, missionary to India, pioneer of Christian humanitarian aid to the Dalits, the lowest caste in India, confidant of President Franklin Roosevelt, and friend of Mohandas Ghandi. Ghandi and Jones were so close that it was Jones who wrote Ghandi's biography after Ghandi was assassinated, the same autobiography that inspired Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to lead a non-violent movement of civil disobedience in the United States. In 1925, Jones published a book where he recounts the time he asked Ghandi, a Hindu, what it would take

for Christianity to take root and take off in India. Ghandi replied, “I would suggest first of all that all of you Christians, missionaries and all begin to live more like Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

I much prefer this documented version of Ghandi’s quote to the more popular version, because it shows that Ghandi wasn’t criticizing Christians; he was trying to be helpful to Christians. If you want to make more Christians in my home country, he was saying, be more like Jesus Christ, as if Ghandi knew deep down that if the Christians really lived like Jesus Christ, then there was no stopping the spread of Christianity in India. Ghandi was practically recommending Jesus Christ *for* his people and *to* the missionaries.

Now there’s a good word for Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let us take Jesus Christ as good advice both *for* the world and *to* the Christians. For the name and cause of Jesus to take off in the world, the character of Jesus must take root in the Christians before anyone else. The character trait Christians must embody, the trait Ghandi was recommending Christians should embody for their own good and for the good of his own people, was *compassion*. All of you Christians (same here) must begin to live like the compassion of Jesus Christ.

The heart of Jesus’ character, ministry, and likeness is compassion. Compassion is what non-Christians hope to see out of Christians, for it’s clear to them, if not to us, that compassion is what makes Jesus, Jesus. As we’ll see, Jesus offered compassion to everyone he met and expected his disciples to replicate his compassion to everyone they met, making Compassion for Humanity another marker of a person that follows Jesus.

## **A Marvelous Word**

The word “compassion” appears five times in Matthew, more than any other Gospel. Wherever we find compassion in the Gospels, Jesus is the origin. No other character in the Gospels is remembered as feeling compassion for others. Only Jesus.

The English word “compassion” is a translation of the marvelous Greek word *splagchnizomai*. Trust me, it’s more marvelous when you say the word aloud. (The

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<sup>1</sup> E. Stanley Jones. *The Christ on the Indian Road*. Kessinger Publishing, 2005.

“gch” in the middle is supposed to sound like you’re coughing up mucus and the mucus is putting up a fight. Try it. It’s fun.)

*Splagchnizomai* means “moved in the gut.” It’s the feeling of intense connection when you witness the suffering of another creature. Call it pity, sympathy, or being moved, it’s when you feel your insides ache in direct response to the aching of another.

It’s what you feel when you watch one of *those* commercials about starving pets in an animal shelter. It’s the heartbreak when you see a bald child being wheeled out of the oncology wing. It’s the pain you deflect when you’re stopped at the red light and you avoid making eye contact with the human being on the corner, the soul with the cardboard sign. It’s the unconscious impulse driving you to donate to the Red Cross after you see the news coverage of another wildfire. It’s your heart doing a somersault when you see children being separated from their mothers and when the pastor says, “It’s time to clean out your closet and bring your spare coats to church because there’s a person sleeping on the sidewalk who needs that coat more than you.”

The Bible calls this feeling *splagchnizomai*. We call it compassion, which literally means “suffering with.” Compassion is the feeling of suffering with another creature. We feel what it feels like to suffer *with* that person. Now we’re suffering *from* an intense human connection, and the pain moves us to act *out of* compassion. Compassion follows an arc:

1. You suffer *with* someone by feeling a simulation of the pain that is happening in the other person.
2. Now you’re hurting, too. You suffer *from* the pain within you.
3. You do something. You respond *out of* the compassion you feel with your best attempt at kindness, love, and solidarity.

Jesus rode the compassion arc, too. It’s the trait of our Lord’s that is most divine and most humane.

Compassion is what Jesus has been practicing since we last saw him in this study. After the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gets to healing people throughout the “cities and villages” around the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 9:35). He healed a leper by reaching out and touching the leper, an exchange where Jesus’ traded his own cleanness for the man’s uncleanness, leaving Jesus ritually unclean. Jesus walked to Simon Peter’s hometown of Capernaum, where he healed the servant of a Roman Centurion, a Gentile, *and then* heals a Jewish person like him, Simon’s own mother-in-law, showing that Jesus is an equal-opportunity healer and not a healer for the people of Israel only. Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee and immediately meets two “demoniacs” (Matthew 8:28), people with obvious mental illnesses. Not only does Jesus heal their minds; he restores them back to the community that had shunned them and cast them out to live with the rest of the dead in the closest cemetery. Jesus is the healer of bodies, minds, and relationships.

Our English translations use the words “heal” and “cure” to describe this part of Jesus’ ministry. Matthew uses two Greek words interchangeably, the words *sozo* and *therapeuó*. *Sozo* means “save.” Jesus’ ministry was a saving ministry, but we shouldn’t be too quick to spiritualize the meaning of “salvation.” Jesus saved real human bodies by providing high-quality, accessible healthcare to the poor country folks of Galilee. *Therapeuó* means “heal” or “tend to,” the origin of the English word for “therapy.” Jesus’ ministry was a therapeutic ministry, where he treated the physical and mental conditions of human bodies like an occupational therapist would treat a damaged spine or a counselor would treat a sickness of the mind. The compassion of Jesus led him to be a physician to humanity.

Indeed, Jesus calls himself a “physician” after he calls Matthew the tax-collector to follow him. Tax-collectors weren’t the white-collar accountants and IRS agents we associate with federal income taxes. In Jesus’ day, tax-collectors were hired muscle, a step below armed mercenaries. Tax-collectors were on Roman payroll to collect taxes from conquered peoples, meaning Matthew, a Jew from Galilee, was hired by the conquering army to strongarm taxes out of his own kin, taxes which would directly fund the army that conquered them and now polices them.

Tax-collectors were like the low-level gang members that terrorized the apartment complexes in the inner-city neighborhood of Houston that I once called “my hood” because it happened to be where “my church” called home. These gang-members were kids, none of them old enough to walk into a grocery store and show a legit ID to buy beer. It was their job to collect money from apartment tenants in return for keeping the complex “safe” from other gangs, which really meant keeping the tenants safe from *that* gang, the one collecting the money, as if the gangs were the true landlords. Were these kids dangerous? Not really. It was their superiors who called the shots. These kids were caught up in a system they couldn’t escape without becoming victims of gang violence themselves. Still, these kids had zero sympathy from the tenants who were rightfully scared of them.

Matthew is a tax-collector like a bottom-rung gang member is an extortion-collector. He’s high-muscle, low-threat, deeply despised, and very much trapped in a business he’d probably like to escape but can’t escape so long as he likes breathing. It is to such a person that Jesus says, “Follow me.” (Matthew 9:9). Jesus goes so far as to eat dinner at Matthew’s house along with the other “bad people,” the people labelled as “sinners” by the hyper-religious types in Galilee, the Pharisees. The Pharisees can’t fathom why anyone who associate with dirty people like Matthew. Matthew is a criminal, an undesirable. Shouldn’t Jesus keep his distance the Matthew’s of the world? Jesus tells the Pharisees:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners (Matthew 9:12-13).

Jesus is the Great Physician, and not of bodies only, but also of souls who are unwanted and tossed aside. Jesus is Physician to the Matthew’s of our cities and neighborhoods, sinners who know they’re sinners without the religious types telling them so, people who made the same mistakes we’d have made if we were dealt the same hand. The felon haunted by remorse, the ex-spouse who regrets when they were too fragile to handle the temptation, the anonymous faces in 12-step recovery groups, the commuters who pass by the same church every morning and

assume the only thing waiting for them behind those doors is the same judgement heaped on them by their parents- for these people Jesus holds no hard feelings, only compassion.

I was at a bar in Las Vegas for a bachelor party. The bar had a balcony overlooking the Vegas strip. On the wall of the balcony was a neon, hot pink sign. It said, “Sinners Welcome.” The casinos were not my scene, but this balcony was, because it meant I was welcome, too.

The movement of Jesus Christ is a “Sinners Welcome” movement, where the Matthew’s who know perfectly well they *are* sinners feel welcome to come as they are and receive compassion. Imagine if all of our churches were “Sinners Welcome” places. Imagine if we shined this compassion like a hot pink neon sign.

This all-inclusive mercy is what Jesus gives to sinners - and that would be all of us - *and* it’s what Jesus expects out of his disciples. Jesus quotes Micah 6, where God says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” The Pharisees think the sinners like Matthew need to make the correct sacrifices in order to be right with God. “Sacrifice” means more than animals on altars; it means changing your life in order for God to find you likeable. It means the Matthew’s of our mission fields should clean up their act and conform with the pretty and polite lifestyle of good and proper people. But Jesus won’t have it. Jesus knows God loves sinners *before* and *apart from* anything we do, could do, did, or will do.

Mercy in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word, *hesed*, sometimes translated as “covenant loyalty” or “steadfast love.” *Hesed* is core to the nature of God. God is the God of loyalty to the people God has sworn to love. God is the God of stubborn, won’t-quit love. God is the God of non-negotiable love: there’s no talking God out of loving you. Some Bible translations don’t translate *hesed* as mercy. Instead, they use another word, a marvelous word. You guessed it: compassion.

“For I desire compassion, not sacrifice,” says Jesus quoting Micah, who was quoting God. What God desires in God’s own gut is that we would feel love for others in our guts, that we would suffer with the suffering, suffer so much that we suffer *from* the raw love we feel when

we see people in pain, be it physical, emotional, spiritual, or the social kind when humans punish other humans for not being “good enough,” whatever that means.

Yes, compassion is a marvelous word, for it summarizes not only the ministry of Jesus, but the heart of God and all that God expects out of humanity. It’s a low bar, but boy, do we miss it.

### **“He Who Feels It Knows It”**

The end of Matthew 9 is a major turning point in the Gospel of Matthew and in Jesus’ ministry. Up to this point, Jesus was a one-man traveling miracle show. It’s not like Jesus was alone; he had crowds and his inner circle of disciples, those training to be like him. But Jesus has not deputized anyone to work miracles on his behalf. Until now.

Jesus looks at the crowds following him and has – here it is – “compassion” for them (Matthew 9:36). Jesus was already busy “curing every disease and every sickness” in the people who were brought to him. But there comes a moment when Jesus pauses his *doing* and feels a *feeling*. The feeling is compassion, raw love in the gut, and it hurts. Jesus feels the pain his people are feeling.

Beyond “mercy,” another synonym for compassion is “empathy.” Compassion means to “suffer with.” Empathy means to “feel with.” While sympathy is “feeling *for*” someone else, meaning you pity them and have all the warm and fuzzies for the person, empathy is “feeling *with*” the person, which is usually the opposite of warm and fuzzies. You feel their rage, heartbreak, hopelessness, and terror, and yes, it hurts as much as it sounds. But that’s where compassion begins: with the feeling of feeling *with* another.

I was swept up into homelessness outreach in college. One of the guys who lived in the men’s shelter in town was Rastafarian. Jimi Hendrix *wished* he had dreadlocks like this man. One of my friends filmed a documentary of the men who made their beds on the shelter floor. Our Rastafarian friend looked at the camera and said, “There’s a Rastafarian saying: ‘He who

feels it knows it.’ It means you don’t know what a person is going through until you feel it yourself.””

He was right. “He who feels it knows it.” It’s impossible to understand someone and love them in the way they need to be loved until we feel what they’re going through. This is the process of compassion, or empathy. Jesus has a “He who feels it knows it” experience himself when he sees the overwhelming volume of human suffering around him, and the experience is so powerful, he realizes he needs to replicate himself. The suffering around him is so great and the need to respond with compassion is so huge, he realizes that he alone can’t meet the need all by himself.

That may sound strange. This is Jesus, after all; he can do anything. But according to the way Jesus chooses to be the Messiah, Jesus chooses to need help, *our* help to alleviate human suffering and improve life for others. Jesus *could be* a sorcerer who can snap his fingers and magic the world into perfection, but that would deny us of free will and the beauty of the human adventure, as good and terrible as it is. Jesus chooses to be a Messiah who works through others. It’s in response to Jesus feeling *with* others that he summons “laborers for the harvest” to multiply his ministry and his impact on the world.

### **Should I Stay or Should I Go?**

It’s not an overstatement to say that human history for the last two millennia rest on Matthew 9:38, “Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.” Jesus replicates his ministry by deputizing the twelve disciples to act on his behalf. Jesus’ ministry does not depend on Jesus being physically present. Now, the mission of Jesus can exist wherever the followers of Jesus happen to be. Through us, Jesus can be everywhere at once.

Note the change in language between Matthew 10:1 and Matthew 10:2. Jesus summoned the “disciples” to him. The word disciple, as we’ve learned, means student or apprentice. There were twelve apprentices learning how to be like Jesus who answered his call to a different form of service. In the very next verse, Jesus calls these twelve people “apostles.” Apostle means “one



sent out” like a missionary is sent out. The apprentices learning from Jesus have become the missionaries sent out by Jesus.

It's not that the disciples stop being disciples. Rather, Jesus is adding to the job description of a disciple. A disciple is both a student *and* an ambassador of Jesus to the world, for both responsibilities fall under the category of being a follower of Jesus. Following Jesus includes the learning *from* and the deployment *out*.

I served a church where the phrase, “Enter to Worship, Depart to Serve” was written on top of the doorway leading into the sanctuary. Both movements have to do with following. We follow Jesus as he leads into God’s house (Enter to Worship), and we follow Jesus as he leads us out of the building to serve as he would serve (Depart to Serve). In the first, we’re following Jesus *into* the church so we can take our place as one of his students; in the second, we’re following Jesus *out* of the church to be his hands and feet in the world. A follower of Jesus cannot choose one over the other. Every follower of Jesus is both disciple and apostle, learner and missionary.

Let’s remember when Jesus first summoned the disciples to the top of the mountain, where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. The disciples had a choice: will I remain at the bottom of the mountain with the rest of the crowd? Or will I answer the summons to go and be with Jesus? Here, too, the disciples have a choice. Jesus doesn’t force them to take on the additional responsibility of being an apostle. Jesus summons people; Jesus doesn’t force people. The disciples could have turned down the promotion. They don’t *have* to be apostles.

There’s a song by the band *The Clash* called “Should I Stay or Should I Go?” It’s catchy. The chorus goes like this:

Should I stay or should I go now?

Should I stay or should I go now?

If I go, there will be trouble

And if I stay it will be double  
So come on and let me know

The disciples have a “Should I stay or should I go?” moment. Should they stay with Jesus? Should they remain at Jesus’ side and enjoy the comfortable and predictable life while Jesus makes all the hard choices himself? Or should they go? Should they answer the summons to be sent out by Jesus on a wild adventure of compassion for humanity, where the journey is guaranteed to be uncomfortable, unpredictable, and swarming with tough judgement calls?

The choice to go is a life of trouble. The apostle life is a life of suffering *with* humanity. It’s a life of service to the poor, the marginalized, the lonely, the sick, the tough-to-love. It’s a hard life.

But the choice to stay is a life of double trouble. Simply staying behind church walls or on the couch glued to Netflix or YouTube or safe and sound under the umbrella of the known and the expected will mean missing out on a life of purpose and meaning. The choice to stay is the choice to live a shadow life, a life that looks alive but lacks substance.

Following Jesus *must* include the choice to go, the intentional decision to be sent out by Jesus into the unknown and unknowable, to the people thirsting for compassion, for the sake of reflecting the heart of Christ to the world. We can always come back to Jesus’ side and resume our learning and simply being with him. Then we go out again. Following Jesus takes the shape of an accordion: we come back to Jesus to learn from him and be refreshed by him, then we let him send us out, then we come back, then we go, a daily polka of learning from the master and compassion in his name.

### **The Unifying Force**

It’s worth pausing to consider the apostles themselves. They’re a diverse bunch. Let’s look at the roll call in Matthew 10:2-4.

There's Simon Peter and Andrew, and James and John, two pairs of brothers. These are the four original disciples, the first to answer the call to follow Jesus, fishermen who walked away from their nets to become fishers of men.

There's Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James, and Thaddeus. We know little to nothing about these men. Thaddeus is so obscure that Luke calls him by a different name. In Luke, he's "Judas, son of James" (Luke 6:16).

There's Matthew the tax-collector, a government employee and part-time extortionist who strongarmed taxes out of his neighbors and enjoyed the financial benefits of life under Roman occupation.

There's Simon the Cananaean, also known as Simon the Zealot in the Gospel of Luke. Zealots were revolutionaries. They were itching to overthrow the Roman government by force.

Then there's Judas Iscariot, the betrayer.

One made a living off the government, one wanted to overthrow the same government, four were small business owners, four would have been lost to history had they not answered the summons, and one was a traitor in waiting. The most interesting thing about them is their diversity. They are remarkably unlike.

Yet they all answer the call to serve humanity with compassion. There's deep wisdom here. The thing that binds diverse and disagreeing people together is compassion. Uniformity is not essential and, let's face it, boring. What we need is unity. Unity exists when we can all get behind the same compassion causes. We may disagree on politics and policies, and that's not a bad thing. Jesus never asks the apostles to lay aside their differences. He asks them to come together behind compassion. Compassion is the unifying force.

My pastor friend Tom calls this the Red Cross principle. One of Tom's church members asked him why the church wasn't taking a public stance on hot button issues. Shouldn't the

church be bold and take a stand? Tom replied with, “It’s more important to make a difference in the world than to prove a point about who’s right and who’s wrong.” The church member said, “Oh, so we’re Switzerland now? We’re neutral. We’re not taking a side when one side is clearly in the right.” Tom said, “No, we’re not Switzerland. We’re the Red Cross.” The Red Cross is non-partisan and is usually first on the ground to deliver humanitarian aid no matter what side a country takes in armed conflict. The Red Cross principle means we’ll go wherever we’re needed to make a difference in people’s lives. We’ll go to the good people. We’ll go to the bad people. We’ll take a side, yes, but the side is the cause of compassion, not the side of a partisan group.

The twelve apostles obey the Red Cross principle. They don’t let their differences and disagreements divide them or define them. What defines them is the compassion Jesus already has for them. They unite behind this compassion so they can collaborate, work together, and embody compassion for others.

## **Two Statues**

Jesus gives the apostles a set of clear instructions. Top of the list is, don’t go near the Gentiles or Samaritans. Jesus explicitly tells the apostles to confine their compassion to their own kin, the lost sheep of the people of Israel.

That sounds difficult to our ears, but it’s fair to say that the apostles are finite, with limited time, resources, and strength. They only have so much bandwidth. Therefore, Jesus asks them to concentrate their efforts on the people most like them, that is, the people who are easiest to reach. Essentially, Jesus is saying, “Go after the lowest hanging fruit. Reach the easiest-to-reach people.” It’s not that Jesus finds non-Jewish people to be unworthy of compassion. It’s the opposite: Jesus has already healed a Gentile in the Gospel of Matthew! Rather, it’s that Jesus knows he’s working with and through human beings who can only do so much, so he asks them to be realistic. “Go after the people you already know. Take the early win. We’ll get to the Gentiles later.”

The next instructions sound like they’re above the paygrade of mortals. “As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” Cure the sick, raise the dead,

cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.” (Matthew 10:7-8). The apostles are to be preachers of the Kingdom of heaven. Preaching is well within human capacity, no problem. But curing the sick? Raising the dead? Cleansing lepers? Casting out demons? And what might be hardest of all (let’s not kid ourselves) is the apostles are supposed to give themselves away and do it for free. No financial return whatsoever. Nada.

What does an apostle do? Preach good news and embody good news, and do it for free. The apostles – remember, that’s *every* follower of Jesus – are to speak the good news of God’s love for the world with their words and embody that same love with their actions. What does embodying God’s love mean? Jesus gives us four criteria: cure people, raise the dead to life, cleanse people (which in Jesus’ context meant restoring the shunned back to community), and cast out demons. These criteria are not exhaustive, but they’re a good summary of the lifestyle of followers of Jesus, a lifestyle summed up by a marvelous word: compassion.

There are two bronze statues hidden in plain sight in the greater Houston area, and these statues capture the job description of an apostle. The first statue is a life-sized Jesus touching the head of a life-sized hemorrhaging woman, standing tall over the patients and staff at Houston Methodist Hospital in the Texas Medical Center.

In the Gospel narrative (Matthew 9:20-22), the woman sneaks up behind Jesus, hoping to touch the fringe of his cloak without being detected, because her condition as a woman suffering from constant bleeding *for twelve years* made her ritually unclean and unfit to be *seen* in society. More than an untouchable, she’s an unseeable: she’s supposed to be out of sight, out of mind, hidden from society. She creeps up on Jesus so she can grab a bit of healing power without being noticed by him or the disciples. But Jesus chooses to see her. Matthew says, “Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, ‘Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.’” The story never says Jesus touched her. It’s Jesus *seeing* her and her risk of *being seen* that heals her.

I love this story because it transmits the way in which Jesus was a healer: he made the effort to see people as they are, showing God’s healing power is in the loving act of noticing the unnoticed and the people that polite society thinks are unnoticeable. It is this healing power that

holds up the powers of modern medicine. Followers of Jesus are to practice this act of seeing, for the seeing itself *is* compassion. When we see someone who is usually overlooked, we offer the cure of noticing, we raise them a little higher from the dead, we restore them to human community, and we cast out the demon of loneliness.

The other statue is small and sits on a bookshelf in my office. The statue is a homeless Jesus, wrapped in a blanket and asleep on a bench. The statue was a gift from Hope Center, a non-profit agency in Houston that operates a community center for unhoused people.

The statue reminds me of the lost souls in Matthew 8:28-34. The “demoniacs,” as Matthew calls them, are people with mental illnesses so severe, they couldn’t function in usual human society. Their family and friends had run out of ideas for how to help people like this, so the demoniacs, in the absence of a support system, made their home in the cemetery. Today, the demoniacs are the unhoused women and men sleeping on the street. Not every homeless person has a diagnosable mental illness, but many do, and in the absence of a community with the capacity to support them, they make their home in cemetery-like places like highway overpasses and the Dollar Store dumpster.

In Matthew, Jesus heals the demoniacs of their mental illnesses *and* restores them back to the community that pushed them out. Such is the ministry of working with the homeless and anyone with a sickness of the mind. Cure the sickness of body and mind, but don’t stop there. Raise the walking dead from a living death. Restore them to a loving, supportive community. Cast out the demons of trauma, fear, and rejection.

### **Vocation, Vocation, Vocation**

What does this mean for followers of Jesus today? There’s a saying in real estate, that the most important part of buying a house is three words: location, location, location. For followers of Jesus, the most important part of answering our summons to apostleship is three words: vocation, vocation, vocation.

Our vocation is our calling, the equivalent to the “summons” of Jesus. Vocation is all about *where* you hear Jesus calling you to show compassion. The author Frederick Buechner defined vocation as the place “where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.” There’s the work that gives you joy (deep gladness) and there’s suffering you can’t ignore (deep hunger). Where those two things meet is where God needs you to serve.

I would add a third component: the people who are counting on you. There are people depending on you, yes *you*. There are lost sheep that only *you* can reach. I tell my church members that calling is an equation of three variables:

1. Where the work will cost you.
2. Where the people depend on you.
3. Where the joy will find you.

A calling will cost you. It will *hurt*. But that’s compassion: you’re suffering *with* another human being, and there’s no suffering without a cost of some sort. A calling involves people who are depending on you. They’re counting on you and you can’t quit on them. While a calling will hurt, it doesn’t leave you sad or dejected. It’s just the opposite: we find joy, the joy of meaning.

Your calling may be to your children or grandchildren. Your calling may be to your spouse. Your calling may be to your students, friends, and family members. We all have multiple callings, layers of mission fields that need compassion. Other mission fields might be volunteering with youth groups and mentoring children, assisting immigrants and refugees, feeding the hungry and visiting the prisoner. There’s no need to think big. Think *where*. Where do you feel the suffering of people, needed by people, and joy around people? Where those three places meet is where Jesus is calling you to preach the good news. Cure the sick. Raise the dead. Cleanse the leper. Cast out demons.

There’s a saint named Thérèse of Lisieu, a French nun from the 19<sup>th</sup> century who lived to be only 26 years old. She’s taught “the Little Way,” a posture of living where you focus on small acts of compassion for the people God has placed in your life. This quote is attributed to her:

“Love those God has placed closest to you. Do not go looking for more fascinating people to love.” Let us turn to the most unfascinating people we know – our kids, our neighbor’s kids, hospital patients who never get a visitor, the man in our church whose name no one seems to know – and show them the meaning of compassion.

One of my favorite hymns is *The Summons* by John Bell. Here’s the second stanza:

Will you leave yourself behind  
If I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind  
And never be the same?  
Will you risk the hostile stare  
Should your life attract or scare?  
Will you let me answer prayer  
In you and you in me?

What about you? Will you answer the summons to show compassion for humanity? Will you care for cruel and kind? Will you be the answer to Jesus’ prayer for laborers for the harvest?

Will you?



## Leader Guide

Ask someone to read Matthew 9:35-10:8. Ask if there are any initial questions or inspirations in reaction to the text.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. How would you respond to Ghandi's advice, "I would suggest first of all that all of you Christians, missionaries and all begin to live more like Jesus Christ." Do you think more people would adopt Christianity if Christians lived more like Jesus Christ? Also, why *don't* Christians live more like Jesus Christ?
2. Think of a time when you felt compassion for another human being. What was the situation? What did compassion feel like? How did the feeling of compassion move you to respond?
3. Think of a Matthew. Remember, a Matthew is one of the "bad people" whom religious people look down upon in judgement. Who are your Matthew's? Or, when were you a Matthew?
4. What do you make of the fact that Jesus chooses to need help? As God in the flesh, Jesus could have healed all the world's peoples in a moment, but he chooses to work through people. How does that sit with you?
5. Think of a time when you tried a new thing for the cause of Christ. You went on the mission trip. You fed the hungry. You volunteered at church. These are times when Jesus sent you *out* to serve, when you were the missionary. What was the most meaningful missionary experience of your life? And what made it so meaningful?
6. When have you see the Red Cross principle done well? When have you seen different and disagreeing people unite behind compassion? Why did it work? Or, why did it fall apart?
7. When have you seen someone cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the leper, or cast out demons? It may be a metaphorical raising, cleansing, or casting out, but there's no missing the miracle of compassion. When have you seen the miracle of compassion unfold before you?
8. Using the three-fold formula for calling – where the work will cost you, where the people depend on you, where the joy will find you – what are your callings today? (Note that callings is plural. You probably have many!)