

TEXT: Matthew 9:35-38  
THEME: The harvest is abundant  
SUBJECT: Good news  
TITLE: Compassion

Proper 6  
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Messiah Moravian  
Jerry Harris

*And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, **teaching** in their synagogues and **announcing** the good tidings of the Kingdom and **healing** every disease and infirmity. And seeing the crowds he was moved inwardly with **compassion** for them, because they were in distress and cast down, like sheep having no shepherd. Then he says to his disciples, “Indeed the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; Pray to the Lord of the harvest, therefore, that he may send forth laborers to his harvest.” (Matthew 9:35-35, David Bentley Hart’s translation)*

What do you see when you see the crowds protesting the killing of George Floyd by Derek Chauvin? According to an article in “The Washington Post,” June 09, 2020, Tucker Carlson sees a raging mob. “This may be a lot of things, this moment we’re living through, but it is definitely not about black lives. Remember that when they come for you, and at this rate, they will.”

Carlson continued, “Anyone who has been subjected to the rage of the mob knows the feeling. It’s like being swarmed by hornets. You cannot think clearly. And the temptation is to panic. But you can’t panic. You’ve got to keep your head and tell the truth. If you show weakness of any kind, they will crush you.”

“**They** will crush you.” Grammatically, “they” refers to the hornets, that is, the “mob.” Many heard “they” as referring to black people coming to get white people. A spokesperson clarified Carlson’s remarks: “Tucker’s warning about ‘when they come for you’ was clearly referring to Democratic leaders and inner city politicians.” “Clearly!?” Then we need a further clarification: What does “**crush**” mean?

Carlson concluded, “This moment will pass . . . When it does, we will look back at what we just saw in horror and disbelief, but if you’re honest now, you will keep your dignity, and ultimately you will be very glad about that. Life is not worth living without it.”

Dignity!/? What are the crowds in the streets of 500 cities across this country, and many more cities around the world, protesting if not the indignity of being murdered because of the color of your skin?

On Sunday, June 07, the crowd in Washington, DC, was comprised of evangelical Christians. Mitt Romney, unbeknownst to the evangelical pastors who organized and led the protest, joined the march. Romney told reporters he was attending the demonstration to help “end brutality” before adding “black lives matter.” The day before, Romney had tweeted an image of his father, George Romney, then governor of Michigan, participating in a civil rights march in the 1960’s.

The event was described by its organizers as a “Christian Response to Racial Injustice.” There is a branch of the evangelical church that is standing up and speaking out, that believes Jesus is calling them to speak out. Speaking out is being faithful to his commandments. Joshua Little of the International Justice Mission told the Religious News Service, “We are uniting as Christians to stand up against racial injustice.” (“Mitt Romney Joins Evangelical Racial Justice March in DC” *Christianity Today*, June 07, 2020)

Before moving to Minneapolis for a job opportunity through a Christian work program, the 46-year-old George Floyd spent most of his entire life in the historically black Third Ward. He was called “Big Floyd.” His ministry partners say he was a de-facto community leader and elder statesman.

Floyd spoke of breaking the cycle of violence he saw among young people and used his influence to bring outside ministries to the area to do discipleship and outreach, particularly in the Cuney Homes housing project, locally known as “the Bricks.” “George Floyd was a person of peace sent from the Lord that helped the gospel go forward in a place that I never lived in,” said Patrick PT Ngwolo, pastor of Resurrection Houston, which held services at Cuney.

“His faith was a heart for the Third Ward that was radically changed by the gospel, and his mission was empowering other believers to be able to push that gospel forth,” said Nijalon Dunn, who was baptized at Cuney. “There are things that Floyd did for us that we’ll never know until the other side of eternity. There were times where we’d have Church at the Bricks until 3:00 pm, and by 4:30, they’re firing shots right at the basketball courts.”

(These reflections on George Floyd’s life come from an article titled “George Floyd Left a Gospel Legacy in Houston,” in *Christianity Today*, May 28, 2020. *Christianity Today* is an evangelical Christian magazine founded in 1956 by Billy Graham.)

What do you see when you see the crowds protesting the murder of George Floyd? The Gospel of Matthew says, “Seeing the crowds Jesus was moved inwardly with **compassion** for them, because they were in distress and cast down (NRSV has “harassed and helpless”), like sheep having no shepherd.”

“Shepherd” is a common biblical metaphor for leader. In the Hebrew Scriptures, “shepherd” refers to the king. The king is responsible for the well being of the people. Prophets criticized kings for failing to see justice done, especially for the poor, the widows and orphans.

“The Lord is my Shepherd,” declares the Psalmists, “I shall not want.” I shall not want! The Psalm describes what a good leader does: guides, restores, is present with, consoles, protects and provides hospitality in hostile circumstances, and anoints as sacred. These actions assure the Psalmist that goodness and mercy will be his for the rest of his life.

Jesus, the good shepherd, is filled with compassion for the crowd because they are harassed and cast down. Jesus response is to **teach**, to **announce** good news of the kingdom, and to **cure** every disease. Jesus commissions the disciples to do the same, for the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few.

The need for quality education in our increasingly segregated schools (more segregated than any times since the 1960's) is abundant, but the resources and the teachers are few. A good teacher has saved many a life, inspired lazy minds to aspire to greater things than they imagined possible, guided countless souls in wisdom's ways. Pray the Lord of the harvest to send more teachers where they are needed most.

The need for evangelists, for people like George Floyd, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God is great, but no greater than the need to know what the good news is! Pray the Lord of the harvest to raise up priests and bishops who know the difference between free-market economics, private property, libertarian democracy, draconian penal laws, border walls, the "War on Terror," and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The need for curing every disease and every sickness, especially the disease of systemic racism, is abundant. The crowds, growing ever stronger, may be a sign of more laborers willing to do the hard work of justice, the only cure for the original sin of racism, the only work capable of healing a nation. Let us, as Jesus instructs, pray the Lord of the Harvest to swell the crowds until the color of one's skin no longer endangers one's life.

PRAYER: St Ephraim of Syria (c.306-373) teacher.

O Lord and Master of my life,  
remove from me this languid spirit,  
this grim demeanor, this petty  
lust for power, and all this empty talk.  
Endow Thy servant, instead,  
with a chaste spirit, a humble  
heart, long-suffering gentleness,  
and genuine, unselfish love.

Yes, O Lord and King, grant  
that I may confront my own offenses,  
and remember not to judge my brother.  
For You are—always and forever—blessed.