

# SUMMER

## SERMON SERIES 2020



Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in Canada  
*In Mission for Others*

Sunday, June 14, 2020

**Bishop Susan Johnson**

*Matthew 9:35-10:8*

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is a real joy to be able to worship with you in this way today. This time of pandemic is, and has been, very challenging and tiring for all of us. Your bishops wanted to make sure that rostered leaders could take their vacations for much needed rest and that congregations would still be able to gather in worship. That is why we, and the synodical assistant to the bishops, are providing these sermons for use today through the middle of September. Because the harvest is plentiful but the workers are getting exhausted!

In our Gospel lesson today we hear that Jesus has compassion on the crowds that were following him. I hope that during this time of pandemic you have felt Jesus close to you and having great compassion for you and for all God's children who are struggling now with the pandemic, with racism and police brutality, with homelessness, with hunger, with war and displacement, with loneliness and isolation and countless other needs.

Jesus continues to come to each and every one of us and speaks to us a message of hope, of love, of grace and of peace.

But that is not all Jesus says to us.

Jesus is still calling us, each and every one of us, to go out into the harvest to proclaim the good news in word and in deed. And please hear me now, Jesus is not just speaking to pastors. NO! This is a call to each of us who want to be followers of Jesus.

I know that some of you may be already starting to cringe. And it gets worse. Jesus warns us before we go that it is not going to be easy. In fact, it may be very hard.

However, let's remember that the realities of first century Palestine, living under Roman occupation and oppression, and our 21st century Canadian context are very different. Granted there are some worries and dangers now as provinces are opening up. Although we are now painfully aware that Black, Indigenous and other people of colour face more dangers. We all still need to take COVID-19 very seriously as we head out into the harvest.

So today, Jesus would not warn us about the possibilities of flogging or being dragged before governors and kings. Jesus might instead tell us to wear masks, wash our hands frequently, keep 2 meters apart, and to gather in groups of 25 people indoors and 50 outdoors as long as there is physical distancing. Or at least that is what he might say in Manitoba.

Our current reality is that we have learned during this pandemic time that there are people hungry for hearing the good news. I have heard stories across our church of inactive members returning to participate in online worship, of total strangers joining in worship, of larger attendances online than there were in person. I have also heard about amazing generosity both in terms of financial donations and in people continuing to be willing to contact isolated members, to provide worship leadership, to continue to run feeding and outreach programs within guidelines for safety and on and on.

We have proved in a crisis that we can be creative and responsive to God's call. We are reaching out and sharing God's good news in ways that we have never imagined and with effects like we have never experienced. Let's face it, we have been struggling for a long time about how to take evangelism seriously in this time and place. And I remind you that evangelism, sharing the good news, is a part of discipleship to which we are all called. Each and every one of us.

My mom and I have been reading *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. We are trying a COVID-19 book club via Facetime. In his chapter on ministry, Bonhoeffer talks about evangelism as the ministry of proclaiming, one of the ministries that we are all called to take part in. For those of you who haven't read the book, or who haven't read it for awhile, the other ministries Bonhoeffer calls us to are holding one's tongue, meekness, listening, helpfulness, bearing, and authority.

Bonhoeffer acknowledges our difficulty. He writes "Added to the fear of one's responsibility to speak there is the fear of the other person. What a difficult thing it often is to utter the name of Jesus Christ in the presence even of a brother!... Who dares to force himself upon his neighbour?" I know it's difficult and I know it's uncomfortable. But Bonhoeffer goes on to remind us it is our right and our responsibility to do so.

What I'm trying to say it that this topsy-turvy time we have been living through has shown us that people are hungry for God's good news of hope, love, grace, and peace. People are yearning to know that Jesus has compassion for them in their lives.

I'm asking you, I'm pleading with you, let us help each other to learn how to go out into the harvest so that we are ready when our cities and provinces open up to listen to the needs and the yearning and the opportunities to share a word of good news and invite people to come and see. To come and worship. To know the compassion of Jesus.

God bless and strengthen each and every one of you as we all continue to deepen our discipleship in answer to God's call. Amen.