

Moses said to the LORD, ¹⁶“May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community ¹⁷to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

¹⁸So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. ¹⁹Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. ²⁰Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. ²¹He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.”

²²Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. ²³Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed through Moses. (NIV 84)

Theme: Help Wanted: Workers for the Harvest.

1. They are desperately needed.
2. So pray for, support, and encourage new workers.

Help Wanted signs—they are few and far between around these parts. Sure you might see one here or there—but they are mostly for places like fast food joints. Some jobs are easier to get than others. But many people don’t want them because they require long hours, hard work, many days away from home, and the pay may not be all that great. Like a harvester—No, I’m not talking about a farmer sitting in the air-conditioned cab of his John Deere listening to the radio as he turns on the automatic steering with GPS.

I’m talking about the thousands of teenagers and immigrants—both legal and illegal that pick and separate many of our fruits and vegetables—field harvesters. It’s hard work, low pay, in blistering hot conditions. Not too many people want to do it. Yet, there will always be plenty of jobs—for there will always be fruit to harvest. There is another job that many people don’t want to do, a harvester of souls. Being a called worker in God’s kingdom is not the most

desirable job in the eyes of many. But it’s a necessary job. And there will always be plenty of spots available because there will always be sinners who need to hear about the free forgiveness Christ has won for us.

Today is God’s help wanted sign—more workers for the harvest are needed. So we pray for them, support their training, and encourage them.

The Jews had been wandering the wilderness for almost 40 years. Moses had led them the whole time. He put up with their whining and complaining. He prayed to God when they rebelled against him, worshiped idols, or complained about him. He had to fight off those who rebelled against his authority. Even his own brother and sister were jealous of his position. Toward the end of these 40 years the Israelites arrived at Meribah Kadesh, in the dessert of Zin—south of Canaan and East of Egypt. There the people once again complained about God. He took them out to the dessert where there was no water. Even though God had provided for them for the past 40 years in the wilderness, they said it would have been better to be back in Egypt in slavery.

So Moses and Aaron went before the Lord and asked him what to do. God told Moses and Aaron what to do. **Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.** But Moses didn’t do exactly that. No instead, **Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.** God never told Moses to scold the people—but he did. God never told Moses to strike the rock—but he did.

Moses called attention to himself instead of God by saying, **must we bring you water...** He failed to honor and glorify God. And so God punished him. He wouldn’t be able to enter the Promised Land.

Put yourself in Moses’ shoes. He had been leading the Israelites for 40 years. And after those 40 years—because of one seemingly insignificant sin, he wasn’t able to enter the Promised Land. God

allowed him to see the it from a distance. You would think that Moses might be a little jealous of those who got to enter the Promised Land. Or perhaps he would be bitter or hold a grudge. You may remember that the whole reason why they had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years in the first place was because the people didn't trust God and Moses enough to take them into the Promised Land and defeat the large inhabitants of Canaan. Moses had been waiting for this for 40 years. And now because they rebelled against God and complained about him—causing Moses to become angry and yell at them, he couldn't enter the Promised Land.

But Moses didn't get angry. Instead he prayed to the Lord. **May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.** No grudges. No revenge. Just love and compassion. He didn't want the Israelites to be without a leader. He didn't want to leave them scattered throughout Canaan without anyone showing them the way of the Lord. So he prayed that God would give them a good leader, one who would lead them and watch over them in the Promised Land. He didn't want them to be sheep without a shepherd.

Because sheep are stupid and defenseless enemies. Without a shepherd they wouldn't be able to survive. They wouldn't be able to find food by themselves or good clean water. They wouldn't be able to fight off the attacks from all their enemies. Sheep need a shepherd to watch over them, protect them, and to lead them to the proper nourishment. God often refers to us as sheep. We are stupid and defenseless creatures. We don't know God by nature—we can't find true spiritual nourishment on our own. We need someone to show us God's Word. We can't defend ourselves against attacks from the devil. We need faithful called workers who teach the Word properly so that the Holy Spirit can help us withstand the devil's attacks. But right now there are many sheep without a shepherd in our synod. Sure, it is true that these things go in cycles. When I graduated from the Seminary just four years ago there was a log-jam of sorts. There weren't enough positions to go around for all the graduates. But that has quickly changed. In May there were only 23 graduates from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. This combined with the fact that the

largest classes from WLS are now in retirement age has caused a large shortfall. Even after all the graduates were placed there were still 51 vacant congregations. Soon there may be as many as 100 vacant congregations—sheep without a shepherd. And it doesn't look much better for teachers. I believe most if not all of the graduates from MLC who could go everywhere were placed. However, when the District Presidents left New Ulm, there were still 45 teacher request unfulfilled. Lambs, precious little sheep, without a teacher-shepherd to lead them in God's Word.

The need is there. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

So what do we do? We do as Moses did. We pray. We have compassion on God's children. Like Moses. Like Jesus. We don't want any sheep to be without a shepherd for any amount of time. So we follow the Lord's command in our gospel for today. **The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.** We pray to the Lord that he would give us more called workers. We pray that he would give his sheep shepherds and teachers to show us his love and mercy.

And we know that God will answer our prayers. Just as he answered Moses' prayer. God had Moses install Joshua. Soon Moses would die. And Joshua was chosen as his successor. He was given Moses' authority or glory. And all the people knew that the Lord had not forgotten them, but chose a leader to show them the way of the Lord.

Joshua wasn't a surprise selection. You could say that he was trained for it. He had accompanied Moses on many occasions. From time to time, Moses referred to him as his aid. He led the people in battle.

He explored the land of Canaan. He even went up Mount Sinai with Moses on occasion. God didn't just call someone who didn't know what he was doing. He was well-equipped to lead the Israelites. The fact is, we can pray all we want—but it takes more than prayer. We need trained and qualified called workers. Not just anyone can be a shepherd over God's flock. They must know God's Word. They must be able to teach it correctly. Depending on whether the called worker is a pastor or a teacher—whether he works with young children or the elderly, or if he will be part of a small school or in charge of a

1000 member congregation—their gifts and abilities will be different. Yet they will still need to be trained and they all need to be able to teach God's Word.

That is something our synod does well. We operate two prep schools—one is MLS in Saginaw, a college, and a seminary. After high school our pastors spend at least seven years in school and another year as a vicar, or an intern. Teachers spend four or five years in college—many months are spent learning from various experienced teachers. The training our called workers receive is second to none. We can rest assured that our called workers are trained to do their work, and more importantly—are able to teach God's Word in its truth and purity.

But this doesn't happen easily. It takes a lot of work and effort. As well as money. It's not cheap to run four schools in four different locations. And so we support them through out offerings. Part of our offerings go to the synod. And a portion of those go to our synodical schools. Without our offerings and the offerings of our sister congregations we wouldn't be able to train our called workers as we do. So we don't just pray for more harvest workers, we also support their training through our offerings.

But truth be told, our offerings probably aren't going to bring in any more called workers. Sure, we pray for more called workers. And God will answer those prayers. But that doesn't mean we are passive. No, the need for encouragement should be obvious. We should always be recruiting future called workers. Some called workers desire to do so at a young age. Others don't even think about it until someone else brings it up. If you notice someone who may have some gifts for the public ministry—encourage them. Help and support them in whatever way you can. And through you the Lord may answer your prayer for more workers in the harvest field.

The reason why we pray, support, and encourage new workers for the harvest field, should be obvious. The more workers the better and quicker the harvest. The more called workers the more the gospel is spread. The more people hear about their Savior. The more they hear about the one who lived a perfect life only to give it up to us. The more they hear about how he took our sins upon himself. How he suffered and died in our place. The more people hear about the eternal

life that Christ won for the whole world through his resurrection from the dead. The more who hear the gospel, the more the Holy Spirit will work faith into. And the more we will see in heaven forever.

How would you like a job that often requires long hours, to be on call 24 hours a day, to put up with the criticisms of others, to be a jack of all trades, deal with children and their protective parents, to deal with sinners and all their problems? That's the life of a called worker. Many don't see it as the most desirable job in the world. But I wouldn't trade it for anything. It's not just a job—but it's my life. My life is to spend my days in God's Word; and to teach it to others. To be able to tell those who don't know Christ about their Savior who suffered, died, and rose for them. The harvest is plentiful. There is fruit ready to be picked to be stored in God's heavenly store house. All we need is the workers. Amen.