

**CBM***embracing a broken world
through word & deed***she
matters**

Sermon Resource for CBM Annual Campaign

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The following sermon resource was written by Gordon King. It can be adapted and expanded for use in specific congregations. The sermon resource includes an introduction, a reflection on the Gospel reading giving emphasis to the themes of compassion and commissioning to action, an illustration from Rwanda and a suggested prayer. The conclusion will need to be crafted by the pastor who uses this resource.

Introduction:

Today we launch our participation in the CBM Annual Campaign. We join with other congregations in Canada to reflect together, to pray together and to take action together. The theme this year is education. The projects we support will help vulnerable children youth in India, Rwanda and Bolivia to read and to write.

I want to make two comments in the introduction to my message.

Nearly a billion people in the world entered 2014 unable to read and unable to sign their names.

They live in a prison that confines them every day.

The primary meaning of the word "disciple" is "student." This means that the process of teaching and learning are important elements of our faith. I will come back to this point throughout my message today.

The Gospel Reading I Matthew 9:35-10:8

Part 1: Compassion

The Gospel reading narrates an important moment in the mission of Jesus. He has moved about the towns and villages of Galilee. He has proclaimed the coming of God's rule, taught the life-changing values of God's kingdom, and brought healing to people who were weak, physically broken and overcome by evil.

In the story before us, great crowds have come out to hear Jesus speak. They ask for his personal help to make their lives better. They desire healing. They desire transformation. This is not a happy crowd of people lining up with tickets to a concert or a hockey game. The individuals in this crowd are desperate rather than privileged. They are poor. They live on the margins. They experience hunger and oppression. Over half of the children born in their community have died at childbirth or before the age of 15. Life is hard and precarious.

Jesus does not retreat or run away from the crowd. He does not pretend that they are not there. He does not look for a government official to either blame or to take over responsibility for the social needs around him. Jesus sees people -- women, men and children who are harassed and helpless. The circumstances they face are beyond their ability to resolve. They need someone to come alongside and to help them. The gospel text tells us that Jesus had compassion for them. The same word is used when Jesus looked at a hungry crowd and then acted to feed them.

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Jesus felt compassion for a widow who had lost her only son and then acted to restore him to life. In a parable of Jesus the waiting father had compassion on his prodigal son and then acted by running to meet him, embracing him and celebrating his homecoming. In another parable, a Samaritan comes upon a wounded man, has compassion for him, and then acts to save his life. You see the pattern. Compassion is the emotional connection of the heart with people who are broken and in trouble. Compassion is the platform for determined action.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. The symbol of the shepherd represents someone who draws alongside the sheep. He accompanies them, he protects them, and he cares for their needs. This Annual Campaign challenges us to have compassion for people who feel like sheep without a shepherd.

A significant percentage of women are in prison in Bolivia because they engaged in crime in order to feed their families. Many acted as drug couriers. These women lacked education and marketable skills needed for employment. They are often rejected by their relatives because they have brought shame on their families. As result, their children are locked up in prison with them. Prison kids grow up in a jail. You can imagine that a prison is not a good place to spend a childhood.

Rwanda has the highest incidence of child-headed households in Africa. The main cause is AIDS. The eldest child takes responsibility for the brothers and sisters. They are unprotected, vulnerable and poor.

39% of the illiterate people of the world live in India. It is estimated that only 20% of tribal women in the state of Odisha can read and write. This is the location where CBM programs provide literacy training to women in Soura communities. One of the factors that makes this project special is that CBM missionaries Perry and Edith Allaby and Dave and Ruby Hayward worked for decades to learn the Soura language, develop a way of writing it, and to translate the Bible.

Children living in prison in Bolivia. Children in Rwanda struggling to survive physically and emotionally without parents. Women in India who are unable to sign their names or to read simple documents. Do we allow ourselves to feel compassion? Compassion means taking the risk to open our hearts. Compassion means following Jesus into the needs of the world.

Part 2: The Commissioning

The narrative of our gospel reading moves on. There is something striking. We might expect Jesus to throw himself into the crowd and to personally respond to every need. Instead he turns his attention to his closest followers. These men and women are his disciples. He is their teacher. They are his students. Jesus first asks them to recognize the human needs within the crowd and to pray for God's resources. He uses the image of an abundant harvest. Farming families know that at harvest time there is work to be done. They must take advantage of good weather in order to bring in the full crop. Jesus, as a teacher, wants his students to

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see the world from God's perspective. These people on the margins are not simply social problems.

They are men, women, adolescents and children who are loved by God. God does not want their lives to be destroyed like a wheat crop buried by a snow storm.

The disciples are taught that their first act should be to pray that God will send out workers. The task is bigger than the capacity of one person, even when that individual is Jesus. "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."

The next action moves us forward in a sequence from compassion to prayer and from prayer to personal involvement. Jesus chooses 12 disciples who are now designated as apostles. The word apostle simply describes people who are commissioned by their superior and sent out to represent his interests. We might think of an apostle as an authorized agent or ambassador. The apostles are instructed to extend the work of Jesus into other communities and villages in Galilee and Judea. (The time has not yet come to launch the broader mission outside of Israel.) They are authorized to proclaim that God's rule is drawing near and to restore those who are weak and oppressed by the circumstances of life. Their mission is to bring the transforming work of Jesus to new places.

The instructions are clear. The apostles are to live simply and to generously respond to people in need. They are to seek the support of worthy people along the way and bring the blessings of peace to their lives.

Our circumstances are of course much different. We do not travel hot, dusty roads with a staff in our hands. We live in a world of jet planes, automobiles, satellite communications, cable TV and the internet. We shop at supermarkets and put food in a microwave.

But some things never change. There are people who are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd in our time. Some of them live in our communities. Many live in social locations of acute poverty and despair in the global south. Some things have not changed for those who are modern disciples or students of Jesus.

God continues to look on people with compassion. He invites us to open our hearts to them.

God asks us to pray for resources and workers to do the work of his kingdom.

God commissions us to become agents of his transforming love in our world. He asks us to participate in extending the mission begun by Jesus in Galilee.

There are many things we can do that will contribute to God's work of salvation in a broken world. One of them is to support this CBM Annual Campaign. Our funds will take about 150 children out of prison each day in Bolivia. They will be provided with schooling, counselling, health care, recreation and spiritual formation. Our generosity will provide educational opportunities for about 1,000 orphans and vulnerable children in Rwanda. Elementary school. Secondary school. Vocational training. This project also enrolls each child in the national medical program and watches out for their emotional and spiritual needs through adult mentors and pastoral care. The campaign responds to the need of tribal women in India. Hundreds of women will learn to read and to write in the Sora language. These are things that we can do now.

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Rachel's father died in the events of the genocide in 1994. Her mother died of AIDS in 2000. She was a young adolescent with responsibility for three younger siblings. Life was very difficult and Rachel almost gave up hope. CBM's *Children of Hope* program enabled a local church to reach out to Rachel and her siblings. She received training as a tailor and was helped to buy a sewing machine. Rachel has a flair for fashion. She has a thriving business and has become a role model for other children in child-led households. In fact, Rachel is now an adult mentor to three other households with 16 children. Rachel proudly says that she lives with hope. She prays for the people in Canada who helped her during a difficult period in her life.

Prayer *(Clement of Rome around the end of the first century)*

God of creation,
Open our eyes to know you
And place our hope in you,
The highest and the holiest.

God of the spiritual and the material worlds,
You see everything that happens;
You are the helper of those who are in trouble
And the Saviour of those in despair.

Lord and Master,
Help us and rescue all those who are in trouble;
Have mercy on the lowly;
Lift up those who have fallen;
Reveal yourself to the needy;
Heal the ungodly;
Convert those of your people who have gone astray;
Feed the hungry;
Give power to the weak;
Encourage the faint hearted.
Let all the nations know that you are God alone, and Jesus Christ is your Son,
and we are your people and the sheep of your pasture.