

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – June 14

*Matthew 9:35—10:8*

Most of you probably know by now that I'm a Saturday night sermon writer. I sit with the text all week and contemplate themes and what the spirit is trying to speak through the set lessons. It honestly is a process. But nothing is written down until Saturday night... sometimes finished Sunday mornings... And mainly it's because it stays fresh in my head and is easier to preach. But also as I told someone yesterday, it's been working all of these years, and I don't think I want to fix what's not necessarily broken.

So, all of that being said, my brain is still sugared up from strawberries and other delicious treats as I'm making connections. Maybe that's a warning, we'll find out. So with strawberries on my mind, I recalled this cute video I saw this week. My guilty pleasure is watching dog videos online. The world needs more joy... and dogs are great. But it was this woman filming and questioning why her strawberry harvest had been so low this season. And then she catches her dog in action. Sneaking up to the pot, seeing this bright red, juicy piece of fruit. And the dog eats it right off the plant. Free dog treat the pup didn't have to earn. Our dog Bryce, he loves all kinds of berries. We call blueberries "Brycey Bites." But then, we make him earn his Brycey Bites. A handshake or high five usually does the trick. But this pup in the video got a nice free treat, no tricks required. That's Bryce's dream right there.

But this pup was receiving an example of what we receive in our gospel. No, not more sweet treats. But goodness and grace. Free treats that, for the pups, just appear magically out of this air.

Yesterday, we shared in a day of joy and sweetness. And we provided that as well for folks who came and joined us. A place to come, get your face painted, have a balloon sword fight, share in a sweet treat, laugh,

relax, and enjoy your day. We provided that, mostly freely given. An extension of the joy that we receive here in our church community. We extended that out to our neighboring community! In many ways, what we experienced yesterday is a picture of the gospel—something good, something joyful, something given freely. Jesus tells his disciples: “Freely you have received; so freely give.” But what did the disciples receive from Jesus? What have we received from Jesus?

Any ideas? Salvation, forgiveness, love, hope, grace, and presence. The disciples were also given authority and purpose to go out and share all that they received. The ministry of Jesus and his disciples was meant to be given freely as a gift for all who receive it. It was given out of compassion. For us sheep without a shepherd. And so as the disciples received the gift of the good news so freely, they went and shared it abroad. As do we.

God’s grace is not a possession for us to hoard, but rather a gift in motion. As we receive it continually, we are called to give of it continually. Can you imagine if yesterday, we only allowed certain people to attend the Strawberry festival? Like, oh, you’re not baptized, sorry, no strawberries for you. Or, oh, you’re not one of our kids, you can’t have a balloon animal. That would not only contradict the spirit of the event, but the entire point of our gospel that we’re called to live out.

Yesterday we lived our gospel by giving our time, our hospitality, welcome, and joy to those who joined us. It was just one way that we live out our calling. Jesus tells us that there’s a need for his gift to be shared into the world. The harvest is plentiful. We live in a world that needs more joy and grace.

And that’s what separates us from the world around us. While there is division and hatred in the world. Rejoice is a space of welcome, grace, and hope. We have a gift here that makes us special. This gift that has been freely given to us so that we go out and share.

We often pray for God to fix things. To send someone to solve our problems. But what if WE are already the answer to our prayers. Sometimes, if not most times, God's response is, go, I am sending you. As Jesus called his disciples, we are called as well.

Go to the lost sheep. Go and share the good news. That doesn't always mean to go out and bash someone over the head with Jesus. But it does mean to go out and live that radical hospitality. Be generous with God's grace. Show the world that God's love is for each of us.

Regardless of what the world claims, everyone has a place at God's table. Everyone is worthy of love. Yesterday may have just been a one-day event, but it's also an extension of our identity. We shared God's sweet joy and welcome with those around us. And how sweet that is to be able to share that. But the festival was just one day. How do you plan to continue that welcome today and tomorrow and in the week to come?

We have been given God's grace freely. A gift that we did nothing to earn. Now, we share of that gift freely. To everyone we encounter. Amen.