

Lessons from the Farm: Harvest Time Sunday, 8/27/17

1 This morning I'm trying something a little different. You'll find in your bulletins an insert for the sermon. One side is for you to take sermons notes if you like, while the other side has take-home questions for you to reflect on in the coming week. I'm not promising to do this every week, but I'd appreciate it if you would let me know if and how you find this helpful.

Today we conclude our worship series, "Lessons from the Farm," looking at the farming illustrations Jesus used to teach his disciples about growing spiritually. We're naturally concluding with a focus on harvest time, the goal of every gardener, farmer, and hopefully, every Christian. Of all the stages of growing produce, this is the one that I have the most first-hand experience with and find the most joy. I've harvested apples, pears, lemons, grapefruit, raspberries, blueberries, potatoes, carrots, beets, and even garlic one season out on Marriene and Jerry's farm. But plucking some food out of the ground occasionally doesn't make me a farmer. Dave Sorsoleil, on the other hand, is a real farmer, so I've asked Dave to come and share something about his experience with harvest time.

{Dave Sorsoleil shares, 2-3 minutes}

2 The fall harvest is well underway, and I've finally gotten to enjoy Norm's excellent sweetcorn! Next up for me will be picking raspberries and apples out at Laurie and Joe's orchard. Harvest time has always been a highlight for me, a time when I can get the best tasting, most fresh, locally grown produce, while also doing my part to reduce my consumer carbon footprint. But historically, harvest time used to be less about convenience and freshness and more about survival. When we read about harvesting in the Bible, we should think of the harvest less in terms of hayrides and corn mazes and more in terms of feeding hungry people. From the very beginning in Genesis, we know that God gave us crops to tend for food, and a tithing of the first fruits of the harvest represented a profound acknowledgement that our very lives depend on the daily bread provided through the harvest given by God.¹

¹ E.g., Genesis 4:3, Exodus 23:19

Because of the crucial importance of the food supply and the lack of modern innovations like trains, semi-trucks, and refrigeration in ancient times, it shouldn't be surprising that Jesus and the writers of the Bible should choose to use the harvest as a metaphor for the consummation of human history and the goal of Christian discipleship. No metaphor is perfect, and there is one crucial way in which the spiritual harvest is different than the harvest of our produce. Everyone living in Minnesota is used to the annual cycle of planting and harvesting, typically rotating crops between corn and soybeans, but always taking some consolation that if one year's harvest yield is poor, the next might be better. The harvests we're talking about this morning are not cyclical like that. Each person receives one life in this earthly body, and all creation proceeds from the beginning when God spoke and there was light, to the ultimate conclusion, when Jesus will return and all creation will be restored for eternity. There will be no second crops after the final spiritual harvest, and the results of this harvest are crucial beyond anything we can imagine. It will be the last harvest, and the yield will be eternal.

3 We're going to focus this morning on just two of the many different harvests in view for the Biblical writers: The harvest of our own sanctification, and the harvest of leading others to Jesus. Sanctification is what theologians call the process of growing in holiness, becoming more like Jesus. When John the baptizer said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Bear fruit worthy of repentance,"² that's exactly what he was talking about. You could paraphrase that as, "Show through your attitudes, speech, and actions that you are becoming more holy as the God you worship is holy." Each of us, from the moment God's Spirit first nudges us to turn toward God, are on a journey of sanctification, either becoming more like Jesus- a good crop, or less like Jesus, a crop overridden with weeds. Trying to keep all those Old Testament rules turned out to be too much for people to handle, so Jesus came to hit the reset button, giving us all a clean slate. Jesus tried to clarify and simplify by summarizing everything in just two commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind;

² Matthew 3:8, NRSV

and your neighbor as yourself.”³ Because that turned out to be a little too abstract, Jesus gave us examples, like this one:

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’⁴

The harvest of your soul at the end of time is of limitless importance to you and the God who created you, the one who calls you beloved and wants the very best for you as you “grow up” in your faith. But the same God has an even bigger vision for the harvest, one that requires mature farm hands to go out into the field to bring in the harvest. Leading others to Jesus isn’t just for the an assorted few with an apostolic calling- it’s God’s calling on every Christian, as is evident in the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁵

I’m not saying that you have to become a preacher or a missionary or a street evangelist to fulfill this calling. What I am saying is that in the Kingdom of God, there are no secret agents for Jesus. As Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”⁶ The eternal, once in a lifetime harvest of God depends on each one of us finding a way to go out into the fields to bring in the harvest.

4 For us Minnesotans. Evangelism is a scary word. But take heart! In our reading from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gives us a short course on how we can fulfill our Gospel calling to bring in the harvest for Jesus. It all starts in Luke 10:1 where Jesus sent out the 70 disciples.

³ Luke 10:27, NRSV

⁴ Matthew 25:37-40, NRSV

⁵ Matthew 28:19-20, NRSV

⁶ Matthew 9:37-38, NRSV

“Going” is the essential first step, whether it’s going virtually by making a phone call or by locking your front door and physically moving to another spot. And not just any going will do. We are to go, sent by Jesus. If you’ve ever been sent on an errand, then you know that there’s a difference between doing things according to your own agenda and doing things to accomplish the goals of the person who sent you. And how are we to know the agenda of our master? Jesus tells us to pray before we go. We must all become apostles- sent ones- if we want to help bring in the harvest. Where might you “go” this week as a sent one of Jesus? It doesn’t have to be far away, but you do have to reach out.

5 What will our mission look like? The first thing Jesus tells us to do when meeting others in the mission field is to bless them (“When you enter a home, greet the family, ‘Peace.’”)⁷ It’s always a shock to me when I meet someone for the first time and instead of a blessing, I receive a curse. It’s a shock because it’s startling, but it’s also a shock because it reminds me that there have been times when I’ve probably done the same thing to someone else. There’s no point going in the name of Jesus if the message you’re carrying is one of cursing instead of blessing.

And our mission of grace doesn’t end with a hit and run blessing. Jesus instructs the disciples to establish a relationship that’s marked by gracious behavior: “Don’t move from house to house, looking for the best cook in town.”⁸ and “eat what they set before you.”⁹ Your attitudes and behaviors are on display wherever you go in the name of Jesus, so let others take note of your graciousness rather than your selfishness.

6 When we go in the name of Jesus, we are to do more than be good guests. Jesus charges us to show compassion and care in whatever ways they are needed. Notice that includes both physical care and spiritual care: “Heal anyone who is sick, and tell them, ‘God’s kingdom is right on your doorstep!’”¹⁰ Healing someone’s body without pointing to Jesus is like putting bandages on someone who’s heart is no longer beating.

This last part is where most of us feel more than a little fear and trepidation. Reaching

⁷ Luke 10:5, The Message

⁸ Luke 10:7, The Message

⁹ Luke 10:8, The Message

¹⁰ Luke 10:9, The Message

out to hurting people to offer them healing is hard and often overwhelming work. Even praying for other people is something many aren't comfortable with. But announcing the coming of God's Kingdom with words out loud? Forget it!

7 Sharing Jesus with words is much easier than you think and, when it's done well, it's even enjoyable. I've included some take home questions on the back side of the sermon notes for you to reflect on and even journal with. Sharing your faith story with others begins with being clear about who Jesus is to you and how following Jesus has changed your life. I challenge you to take a crack at answering these questions for yourself, and then finding someone else from our congregation to share them with. If you want extra credit, look for ways to share Jesus with someone outside of our church family this week. But remember, the harvest doesn't begin with the telling. Tend first to the harvest of your own soul, and then go, sent by Jesus and led by prayer, blessing others, being gracious to them, and showing them compassion and care, both materially and spiritually.

8 We're going to close our message again with this Welsh Prayer that invites God to grow us to maturity and fruitfulness. As we pray, consider to whom God might send you as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Ask God to lead you to someone and to give you the right attitudes, actions, and words to share.

Please pray with me.

All: Lord, we would grow with you.

9 One: New shoots reaching out, hands stretched upward, like leaves newly formed, soaking up your light and warmth.

All: Lord, we would grow with you.

10 One: In sunshine and rain, in darkness and light, in cold days and summer days, from Springtime to Winter.

All: Lord, we would grow with you.

11 One: And bring forth fruit that is pleasing to you, fed by your living water, giving sustenance to others.

All: Lord, we would grow with you. Amen.



Buffalo United Methodist Church

...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!



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