

“Reaping What You Sow”
Galatians 6:7-8

July 7, 2019

4th Sunday after Pentecost

I am a “city boy” by any definition of the term. I grew up in a city (Ft. Wayne, Indiana) which had a population of about 200,000 people when I lived there. When I graduated from the seminary, I was placed in a small town (of about 7,000 people) in Wisconsin which was in the middle of their tourist territory so it seemed bigger. After 14 years there, I accepted a call to the middle of rural Nebraska where there was nothing but farms. The town, Ravenna, had 1306 citizens, most of whom were either farmers themselves or were in businesses that served farmers and their families. .

As a city boy, I decided to throw myself into learning the farming lifestyle there. I visited members in their cornfields, rode on combines and other farm implements, and the like. I was feeling quite confident in my newfound knowledge so I decided to show my understanding of and love for farming by including it as an illustration in the sermon.

Since many of the farms in the area had owned by families for generations, going back to the time of the Homesteading Act of 1862, I did a little research on homesteading. I don’t know what point I was trying to make in the sermon but I made the statement that, as a result of homesteading, every family received 1000 acres of land for free in order to farm. When I greeted people at the back of the church after the service was over, I’ll never forget an old farmer in the congregation who came up to me with a smile on his face and said, “Pastor, you just made us all very rich men.” I had no idea what he meant until he said, “Every family received 160 acres of free land through the Homesteading Act, not 1,000.” It turns out that, in my research, I had misread a source which said that approximately 1000 grants were made, not 1000 acres in each grant. So, I was a wee bit off.

However, as stupid as I was about homesteading, even I couldn’t mess up or misunderstand the basic truths about farming corn in Nebraska or anywhere else. If you plant corn in the spring, you will harvest corn in the fall. If you, for some reason, decided to plant wheat, don’t expect a harvest corn. It would be very foolish to think so. If you somehow managed to plant weeds, you can’t expect to have a harvest of corn later on. And, if you plant nothing at all in the spring, don’t expect a crop of anything in the fall. Even a city boy can figure out and understand these things about planting and harvesting.

There is an old saying in our text which compares the truths of what we can expect in farming with the truths of what we can expect in life with God. It makes understanding the issue very clear and easy: “Whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” Sometimes it is shortened down to, “You reap what you sow.” Basically, it means if you plant something, you’ll harvest only that. To think that you can harvest something different than what you planted before is foolish. And, expecting to harvest a good crop without having had planted anything, is really foolish. Yet this is exactly how many people think when the saying is applied to our Christian life.

As Christians (especially Lutheran Christians), we are very afraid of being accused of “works righteousness”. This is the teaching that we must earn our salvation,

in whole or in part, by the good things that we do. We emphasize strongly that we are saved by grace, through faith, apart from any works of the Law. We often do not talk about living a Christian life for fear that it be thought that somehow, we are saying that living the Christian life helps to save us.

So, we separate what we believe from what we do. The book we're using in our Sunday morning Bible Class, *Authentic Christianity*, calls this "compartmentalizing." It means that we divide our life into many compartments in such a way that they have no interaction with each other. What we believe may be different than what we do. We are free to believe what the Bible says and, at the same time, free not to do what the Bible commands. Many people feel that there is no problem in doing this. After all, we are saved by grace and not by works. God loves me just the way I am and forgives me no matter what I do, right?

Not exactly. In the chapter before our text, Paul runs through a laundry list of very serious sins which afflict, not only unbelievers, but Christians as well. Paul is very adamant that such things are wrong to do and that we should not do them. He calls them "the works of the flesh" and says they are: "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like that." (Ephesians 5:19 – 21a) Although some of these things may not apply to you, others do apply. And if you feel that none apply to you personally, remember that this is not an exhaustive list of sins. Paul says "and things like that". There are more than just those things.

These and other sins challenge us as Christians today, not because they are new, but because of how these actions are viewed in our world today. These actions are not only allowed in our culture today, but they are praised, accepted, supported, and encouraged. As a result, many Christians do these things and see no problem in doing so. They may go to church on Sunday to practice their religious beliefs after having lived much differently on Saturday night.

Evidently, we and other Christians think that we can continue to carry on with serious and deliberate sin such as this without causing any problem in our relationship with God. We can continue to believe one way and act another way without consequences. However, Saint Paul has these chilling words, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap." Don't fool yourself into thinking that what you believe is important, but not what you do.

God will not be mocked. The word literally means "to treat with contempt" or "turn up one's nose at." In other words, do not fool yourself into thinking that your life does not need to change as long as you believe the Gospel and have true doctrine. It's like planting weeds in the field and expecting corn to grow. Nothing good will come out of it.

You cannot turn up your nose at God's law or treat it with contempt. "God will not stand for it. God will not be mocked by human beings or by their choice of lifestyle. The scales of justice will be set right. People will reap what they sow." (p. 619) Paul says, "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption." If, in the farm of our lives, we decide to plant evil actions which agree with our sinful human nature, such as those mentioned above, we will "reap" destruction.

There is a solution. If you don't like what you're harvesting, maybe you need to plant something different. Believers have a choice here. This passage is not directed toward unbelievers or unconverted people and how they can be saved by their obedience. Rather, this is about believers who have already been saved living lives of obedience.

As Christians, we have the Holy Spirit. Many of us receive the Holy Spirit when we were baptized and cleansed from our sin. Others receive the Holy Spirit when they heard the Gospel and believed. That means we can choose change. What change? Instructed by the Holy Spirit with the Word of God, we can know what the "good seed" is. We can know what the will of God is, no matter what our culture and our society tell us it is or mocks us for what it is.

Paul gives us another laundry list in the previous chapter of what the Holy Spirit desires us to have and to do and which He will produce in our lives. Going along with the agricultural comparison, St. Paul calls the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives "fruit – the crop produced by the Holy Spirit's dwelling and work in us". Paul says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;"

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can actually do what God desires for us to do. God's will for our lives is not something theoretical nor is it something that is cancelled because we have been forgiven and saved for the sake of Christ. It is something to be done. We have the power to refrain from that laundry list of evil which Paul brought out and all other sins, even if our society as a whole and our friends in particular are doing those activities and are encouraging us to do the same.

Encouraged by the Holy Spirit, we will not only know what the will of God is and have the power to do what the will of God is, but we will be encouraged by the Holy Spirit to actually do the will of God. We will be encouraged by His love, His full and complete forgiveness when we fail for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, and His death on the cross; and His promise of everlasting life by virtue of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. All of those are true and, thus, we are free to live the will of God without having to worry about those things as: love, forgiveness, and life eternal.

By sowing, that is, living according to the Holy Spirit, we shall reap eternal life. This is not something we earn doing good works, but the good works are a result of the faith which produce them. In His parable on The Final Judgment, Jesus says of those who inherit eternal life, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." (Matthew 25:35-37) These people were not doing this in order to get to heaven. In fact, they weren't even aware they were doing such good works. However, having been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and going to heaven, these were the natural result of that salvation in their lives.

Now, maybe you may not feel all that empowered, encouraged, and enabled to do such great things. Why? Perhaps, you're using that feeling as an excuse for not doing such things. Perhaps, you're not trusting the promise of the Holy Spirit to do these things in your life. Or, perhaps, you simply haven't been in touch with the power

source to do this: the Holy Spirit. In order to sow to the Spirit, you need to be where the Spirit is active empowering, encouraging, and enabling believers.

The Divine Service is the place to get it started. We do not come here to give to God our worship, our attention, our prayers, our offerings, or anything else. We come here to receive from God all that we need to live the life that God has given. Here, we receive forgiveness for all of our sins which is like clearing a farming field of debris. We are strengthened, comforted, and empowered through the Means of Grace: the reading of the Word of God; the preaching of that Word of God; the eating and drinking of the very body and very blood of Jesus Christ in the Lords Supper.

Sunday School and Bible Class are not simply places to increase our biblical knowledge. However, in these places we are instructed about the good seed to plant and where we are taught how not to be fooled by the bad seed. To adapt the words of our late brother, John Birkholz, is there any God pleasing reason why all of us are not involved in studying the Word of God? Who among us, even in the pulpit here, has studied the Word of God so thoroughly that they no longer need instruction in the Word of God? Not a single one of us.

No important discipline – getting in shape, losing weight, gaining a diploma, and so on – can be achieved through sporadic and infrequent participation. This is true if we expect to sow rightly and eventually receive a good crop. Every day encounters with the Word of God are essential. Reading the Word of God and devotions based on that Word, as well as meditating upon the Word of God and responding with prayer.

All that's left than is to sow only the good seed of the Holy Spirit all the time. As Christians, our desire is to only do what the Word of God calls for and nothing else. Does this mean we will always accomplish that? No, we won't. However, there is always the forgiveness for those sins done in weakness and by mistake. There is also renewing and restoration to start over again.

Let us resist sowing seed that satisfies sinful human desires. In this crazy age in which we live, that means to know what the true seed is. And that leads us back to reading the Word, studying the Word, hearing the Word, and taking to heart the Word. Continue to let that Word, not only influence your life, but direct it and order it, not only just in your religious life, but in all of life.

Farming or gardening is a pretty absolute activity. There aren't a whole lot of shades of or degrees of success or failure. You don't plant daisies and expect roses to grow in your gardens or wheat and expect corn to grow in your fields. You don't allow life killing weeds to grow in your garden and expect fresh fruit and vegetables to grow. And you don't do nothing and expect to get a good crop in the end. Instead, you plan the best of seed. You diligently work to care for, feed, and weed so that you get the best harpist ever. There is no compromise.

In your life as a Christian, it is the same. St. Paul reminds us that faith is shown, not only in words and confession, but also in action and deed. Freedom in Christ is not free. Jesus paid for it with his life. Nor, is it a freedom to sin. God expects changed in different lives from those whom he has saved. You can't change that, refuse it, or ignore it. God is not mocked. You reap what you sow. So, sow to the Spirit and, from the Spirit, reap eternal life. Amen.