

“Handling A Huge Harvest”

Luke 10:1-20

July 7, 2013

7th Sunday After Pentecost

Having lived and served in rural Nebraska for nearly nine years, I learned a lot about farming, especially the harvest. First of all, I learned that the harvest is something totally brought about by God. The farmer cannot produce the harvest. God provides the seed and soil, the rain and the sun. I used to joke with the farmers in our congregation that they, above all other people, should be in church every Sunday since they were totally dependent upon God for their livelihood.

Secondly, the only job of the farmer is to bring the harvest in from the field. Yet not every one can or should do this. Some are not trained nor do they have the experience to run expensive farm equipment in bringing in the harvest. Some are needed in supporting roles. For example, I once sat in a combine with a farmer to keep him company. The wives fixed the food and fed the farmers. Everyone had a job to do. Since the goal is to get the harvest in, this division of duties was not a problem.

Thirdly, if the harvest is left out in the field because of bad weather or because the farmer didn't have enough help at harvest time, the harvest will be totally ruined and destroyed. It will certainly rot in the field.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus compares His mission with a harvest. He says, “The harvest is plentiful.” Obviously, He is talking about people, but which people? In farming, the harvest only refers to the grain – that which the farmer values and will bring into his grain bins – and not the weeds and other plants. Given that image, some might think that when Jesus talks about the harvest, He is only talking about certain people – only the people God wants to save – and not those who are spiritual weeds.

That is not true. The harvest spoken of here refers to ALL people, not just some. God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, His Word says. The most well know

verse in the Bible says, “For God so loved *the world*, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” There are no spiritual weeds outside of God’s love and desire.

Sin is the problem that keeps people out of the harvest. Therefore, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to redeem ALL people from sin and death, not just some. Unlike some Christians who believe that Jesus only died for the elect to make peace between them and God, we believe, as the Bible teaches, that Jesus has died to reconcile all people to God. By His resurrection, Jesus has shown and guaranteed that this has been accomplished. ALL people have been reconciled with God and are at peace with Him. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.” (2 Cor. 5:19)

The problem is not that some people have been saved by Christ and some haven’t. The problem is that some do not know or believe that this is the case. Therefore, they miss out on the benefits of the Savior’s work. A story I often use in confirmation class illustrates this point. Suppose someone went down to the bank and put \$1,000,000 into an account with your name on it. If you did not know about this money, it wouldn’t benefit you at all. If you knew about it but didn’t believe it, the same would be true. You could die in poverty, even though you had a \$1,000,000, because you didn’t believe you did.

Jesus died on the cross for the sin of the world. Forgiveness for all sins for all people has been earned by Jesus’ death. But many people don’t know about this forgiveness and therefore will not benefit from it. Jesus rose from the dead to guarantee life eternal in heaven for all people. But many people do not believe that and, by not believing, will not share in eternal life in heaven.

Therefore, the job to be done is not to create a harvest, that is, to “get people saved”. The job is to proclaim the great news that they are already saved. They already have forgiveness for all their sins “in the bank.” They already have eternal life. It has been guaranteed and is now being prepared for them. Workers are needed who can proclaim this news of law and sin, gospel and forgiveness,

salvation and eternal life so that people know of it and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, believe that it is theirs.

Since the harvest Jesus speaks of is all the people in the world, it is truly a huge harvest. Therefore, Jesus says, “the laborers are few.” In our day and age, if there is a big job to be done and few to do it, our immediate response is, “Well, let’s all chip in, work together, and get the job done.” In other words, everyone should be doing the same thing – bringing the harvest in.

But that’s not what Jesus says should be done here. Jesus says, “Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Pray? Although we pay much lip service to the value and importance of prayer, we usually act as if prayer is not really doing anything important when there’s a big job to be done. We believe that we should be “doing” something instead of just praying. Praying is treated as our last option (“all we can do now is pray”) rather than our first resort in any given situation.

Praying for more laborers may also strike us as being unnecessary since we should all be doing that already anyway, right? But this is true only if you think that Jesus means that all Christians are to be laborers in the harvest in the sense of proclaiming the Law and Gospel in the same way. That’s not the way Jesus speaks in our text. He does not call all Christians to this task. From all Christians, Jesus calls some to labor in the harvest in this way. In the chapter before the text, Jesus chose twelve men to be apostles and sent them out specifically to proclaim the kingdom of God. In our text for today, Jesus appointed seventy-two others and sent them into every town and village where He was to go. They, too, were to proclaim the kingdom of God.

Those chosen by Jesus and specifically sent out were given a tough task. They were to go out like lambs among wolves. They were not to be weighed down by money or possessions. They were to show integrity in their actions. They were not to go around from house to house, begging for money. Instead, they were to stay in one place and accept the support they were given. They were also to show integrity in their message. They were to declare the great news that “The kingdom of

God has come near to you.” The reign of God had come into this world in the person of Jesus Christ. He would make all things right again by taking God’s wrath and judgment against sin upon himself and overcoming death in order to give life to all.

However, when they were not received, these men called and sent by Jesus were to speak the horrible news which came in the same words: “The kingdom of God has come near to you,” but meant something completely different. God’s Kingdom had come near and they had rejected it. Therefore, God’s wrath and judgment would rest on them. The called servants would even shake the dust of the town off their shoes as they left as a sign of their rejection.

Today is the same. The harvest is great. The laborers are few. So, God calls some to be laborers in His harvest as those who would proclaim the Law and Gospel of His Kingdom as pastors. This calling is not for all Christians. It’s not even for all men. The calling is for those whom God has chosen and called out from among all Christians

This is difficult for many, even Christians, to comprehend in our world today. We treat the call into the ministry as a right to which everyone is entitled or a job open to anyone who can do it. But this is not a matter of rights or abilities. It is a matter of Christ calling in order to give complete comfort and full assurance to those in the great harvest.

Those whom Christ calls, He equips with His Words. These are not just any words or merely words of information. They are words possessing power. They are Christ’s own words. Jesus promises those whom He calls, “The one who hears you hears me.” So when those whom Jesus has called speak, they speak Christ’s words, possessing Christ’s power, and doing what Christ desires.

The called servants speaks God’s Law authoritatively to those in the harvest to help them see their sin and driving them to repentance. God’s Law, spoken with Christ’s power, will convict people of their sin.

The called servants speak God’s Good News – the Gospel – confidently to those in the harvest to help them know that Jesus took that burden of sin upon Himself on the cross and believe that

through Jesus' death, they have forgiveness; and that through Jesus' resurrection to life, they have a new life that goes past the grave into eternity in heaven. God's Gospel, spoken with Christ's power, will bring people to a knowledge of their Savior Jesus Christ and grant them faith to believe that what Christ did for the world, He most certainly did for them.

As the harvest is brought in, the called servants speak on Christ's behalf and with His power when he says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." These words of Christ, along with the water, bring new life and faith to the individual.

When the called servants say, "As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins," those sins *are* truly forgiven. We know this because we are hearing Christ Himself through His servant.

When the called servants speak the same words over bread and wine which Jesus' spoke over bread and wine on the night before He died, we know Jesus' body and blood are truly present because we are hearing Christ Himself through His servants. We know then that this body and blood are able to give us forgiveness, life, and salvation which they won for us on the cross.

Meanwhile, all Christians can be praying for more laborers to go into the harvest field as Christ commands. This is what is needed to bring in the huge harvest. And, since Christ has commanded us to pray that, we know that this is a prayer which is pleasing to Him and one which He will joyfully answer.

All Christians can also support those who are already laboring in the harvest field so that they might devote their attention to this work. Jesus says in our text about this support, "the laborer deserves his wages." Paul says the same thing in our epistle reading, "One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches." God's called servants are not doing this labor for money, yet they do need the essentials of life in order to do this labor.

Does this mean that none but called servants ever speak the Word of the Lord to people? Not at all. Everyone can speak the Word of God but only in the vocation to which they have been called.

Remember a couple of weeks ago when we heard the account of Jesus healing a man possessed by demons in the country of the Gerasenes? That man wanted then to go with Jesus as part of the apostolic group. But Jesus denied him that position. Instead, Jesus said, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." This man would not be an apostle, but he would speak the Word of God to His family and those around him. You, too, have that great privilege and opportunity to tell those in your home, family, and circle of friend how much God has done for you."

All can be happy in their service. The called servants are to be happy in what they do in speaking the Word of God, but not haughty or self-serving. When the seventy-two came back, rejoicing over what they had accomplished, Jesus warned them not to get excited over what they had done, but rejoice that God had written their names in heaven by grace like all believers.

Others are to be happy in what they do in praying, supporting, and sharing the Gospel among friends and family and not feel unimportant or think they have a second-class status. In doing these things, they are doing what Jesus commands. Our joy is in serving Jesus, no matter what form that service takes. The goal is to bring the harvest in and not dispute with Jesus as to how that is done.

Our hymn of the day sums it up well. I hope you paid attention to these familiar words as you sang them. After speaking of the call to laborers in the harvest in stanza one, the hymn writer says,

*If you cannot speak like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus,
You can say He died for all.
If you cannot rouse the wicked
With the judgment's dread alarms,
You can lead the little children
To the Savior's waiting arms.*

*If you cannot be a watchman,
Standing high on Zion's wall,
Pointing out the path to heaven,
Off'ring life and peace to all,
With your prayers and with your bounties
You can do what God commands;
You can be like faithful Aaron,
Holding up the prophet's hands.*

*Let none hear you idly saying,
"There is nothing I can do,"
While the multitudes are dying
And the Master calls for you.
Take the task He gives you gladly,
Let His work your pleasure be;
Answer quickly when He calleth,
"Here am I, send me, send me!"*

Amen