

Harvest Time

Colossians 3:15-17, Luke 9:57-10:2

This week hundreds of families will gather for the Thanksgiving holiday, for lots of food, conversation, watching football. Of course, for most Americans the meal will include turkey.

And as careful as you may be about cooking the turkey, there will be those because of all the food preparations may end up overcooking and maybe even burning the turkey. I came across these words of encouragement for those responsible for cooking the turkey. It is entitled: 10 Reasons to be Thankful you Burnt the Bird: 1. Salmonella won't be a concern. 2. Uninvited guests will think twice next year. 3. Your cheese broccoli lima bean casserole will gain newfound appreciation. 4. Pets won't bother you for scraps. 5. No one will overeat 6. The smoke alarm was due for a test. 7 Carving the bird will provide a good cardiovascular workout. 8. You'll get to the desserts even quicker. 9. After dinner, the guys can take the bird to the yard and play football. And number 10. You won't have to face three weeks of turkey sandwiches.

Well, thanksgiving is a time to remind us that we are to be thankful in all circumstances, the good as well as the bad. It is a reminder of living in the spirit of gratitude in all things. Paul writes to the Colossians: "And whatever you do, whether in word and deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

And when I think about Thanksgiving I also think about harvest. That the time of harvest has come and it reminds us of all the provisions of life that we have received from God's hand. Like we sing in the hymn, "Come ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home; all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin."

I remember when I was about 10 years old, we lived across the street from a huge tomato farm. One of my friends and I got to be out in the field to help with the harvest. Of course for tomatoes, it wasn't fall, it was probably July or August and it was very hot in the summer sun. So when the time came for picking the tomatoes you would see all these hundreds of baskets all over the field filled with

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ripe tomatoes. We had the opportunity to join with the migrant workers who had been hired for this hot job for the summer months. And lifting a basket of tomatoes onto the wagons was pretty hard work for a little kid like me, but it was satisfying to know we were helping to bring in the harvest. That we had some part in putting food on people's tables.

Harvest time is truly a recognition of the gifts we have received from the one who is the Lord of the harvest. Harvest time...all the hours and days of hard work, the plowing, the planting, the cultivation that bring us to the time of the harvest. And I think it is at Thanksgiving we are acutely aware that we are blessed people and how important it is for us to give thanks for all of these blessings.

You know, when you consider the significance of the harvest and its importance in the cycle of life, it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus would convey the image of the harvest to his followers. Jesus' words about harvest were more than about being thankful, they were connected to a responsibility we have to be in mission and ministry. That we would look at the world about us, not the crops in the field, but the people around us who represent the harvest field. And here is the challenge: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

What an exciting and compelling challenge. Jesus calling us as part of the kingdom of God, to look at the world around us as a mission field ready for harvest. People who are seeking for something in their lives, a yearning in their hearts to find some hope, some peace, some good news, people who are in need of God's mercy and saving grace. Yes, the world around us is truly a harvest field.

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, this is our invitation, this is our calling. But let's be honest, we are good at making our excuses. Because life gets busy, we have our own lives to lead, our own affairs to attend to. I guess we are not any different than the ones Jesus talked about in today's Gospel: Those who said: "I will follow you wherever you go, but they had their reasons for putting things off. They seemed like legitimate concerns; "let me go and bury my father", "let me say farewell to those at my home." Jesus' reply might seem a little strong but I think

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they were given to express the urgency and importance of this harvest work. “Go, and proclaim the kingdom of God.” “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” This harvest work is serious work, a mission that we all are called to be part of.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” There are many opportunities for mission and service, but we hold back...we miss the opportunities to get out into the field.

This past week in our church council meeting, we heard Nicole Cardwell-Gross, the mission director from our conference challenge us to take those steps of faith and reach into our communities. She described it as jumping into the deep end of the pool, even when we might be fearful that we will drown. Jumping into the deep end means trying to taking the risk of getting into our communities and finding new ways to reach people for Jesus Christ. This is Jesus’ challenge for you and me. We must be prepared to be in the harvest.

First Jesus calls us to pray...Pray to the Lord of harvest for more to go out into the fields to be about kingdom of God work. We pray that more hearts will be stirred to move from a place of comfort and complacency and feel compelled to be persons committed to being in mission and ministry. This is spiritual work and it requires the anointing and leading of the Spirit of God to carry it out. So we need to earnestly pray as individuals, as a congregation, to pray for God to speak to our hearts and lead us be his faithful servants. Just like a farmer who is looking for extra workers at harvest time, God is calling us to be about this life-changing work.

Last week we concluded our series on the Beatitudes. You remember how we described them as “Kingdom life principles”, Jesus calling his followers to a different way of living. And how we said that blessing was more than something we receive, but it was also a call to do something about our blessings. It is not just the blessing for the meek, but to live in the spirit of meekness. Not just the blessing of receiving God’s mercy, but to be merciful, not just finding peace, but

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to be a peacemaker. These beatitudes were a call on how we are to put our faith into action.

In Pastor HeyYoung's sermon last weekend, she shared the experience of thousands of Russian Koreans who were made to travel by train in a forced migration of over 4000 miles. She told about how hungry people refused to eat the grain and seed they had brought in order to save it for planting. It reminds me of story by a missionary who served for fourteen years in West Africa. He said: "I was always perplexed by Psalm 126 until I went to the Sahel, that vast stretch of savanna more than 3,000 miles wide just under the Sahara desert. In the Sahel, all the moisture comes in a four month period from May through August. After that, not a drop of rain for eight months. The ground cracks from the dryness, and so do your hands and feet. The winds of the Sahara pick up the dust and throw it thousands of feet into the air. It then come slowly drifting across West Africa as a fine grit...The year's food, must all be grown in those four months. People grow sorghum in small fields." He said: "October and November are beautiful months. The granaries are full, the harvest has come. People sing and dance. They eat two meals a day. The sticky sorghum mush is eaten hot and the meal lies heavy on their stomachs so they can sleep. December comes, and the granaries start to recede. Many families omit the morning meal. Certainly by January not one family in fifty is still eating two meals a day. By February, the evening meal diminishes. During March children succumb to sickness. In April you hear the babies crying in the twilight. Most of the evenings are passed with only an evening cup of gruel. Then, inevitably it happens. A six or seven year old boy comes running to his father one day with sudden excitement. "Daddy, daddy, We've got grain...out in the hut where we keep the goats, there's a leather sack hanging up on the wall. I reached up and put my hand in there. Daddy, there's grain in there! Give it to mommy so she can make flour, and tonight our tummies can sleep!" The father stands motionless and explains: "Son, we can't do that. That's next year's seed grain. It's the only things between us and starvation. We're waiting for the rains. The rains finally arrive in May, and when they do, the young boy watches as his father takes the sack from the wall and does the most unreasonable thing imaginable. Instead of feeding his weakened family, he goes

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to the field and with tears streaming down his face, he takes the precious seed and throws it in the dirt. Why? Because he believes in the harvest. The act of sowing hurts so much that he cries. But as the African pastors say when they preach on Psalm 126: “Brothers and sisters, this is God’s law of the harvest. Don’t expect to rejoice later on unless you have been willing to sow in tears.

What does it cost you and me to sow in tears? Not just giving out of our abundance, but finding a way to say, “I believe in the harvest, and therefore I will give what may not make sense.” Certainly this applies to our stewardship on this stewardship weekend when we offer our gifts for God’s work, but I believe it is also a call to how we live out our stewardship. To respond to God’s call to into the field, where we can plant the seeds of our faith, where we can bring the good news of Jesus, where we can get involved in mission that may put us in uncomfortable territory, where can work in his mission field and believe that God will help us to reap a harvest. Hear the words of Psalm 126: “Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.”

I invite you to consider how God is leading you to be part of the harvest. That in this Thanksgiving season we will think not only about our blessings, but also how our lives can be an expression of thanksgiving to God as we share our faith, as we find ways to serve and make a difference for the kingdom of God. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.” Ask the Lord, “What can I do as a worker in the field?” How does the stewardship of my life reflect that harvest mentality? Remember our exit sign as you leave the church parking lot. “You are now entering the mission field.” Let it be true of each of us as we enter God’s mission field. That we will exclaim it as people of faith: “It’s harvest time.”