

“A Plentiful Harvest”
Stewardship Sunday
Luke 10:1-9
Rev. Chris Mereschuk
October 29, 2017

Prayer...

Jesus had a pretty good ministry going, and he was ready to take it further. According to the Gospel of Luke, by the time Jesus sends out 70 disciples to do some test-marketing around the countryside, he had been preaching in synagogues, performing some healing miracles and exorcisms, and confronting Pharisees. He had called the original 12 Disciples and raised someone from the dead — you know, just your typical day-to-day messianic proclaiming, signs and wonders of the coming Kin-dom of God.

Jesus had amassed quite a following, but he was not done. See, he had an urgent message to share. He knew his time on earth was limited. The Kin-dom of God was at hand, and everyone with ears to listen had to hear about it. But he wasn't sure if everyone was prepared to receive him personally. So from the large group of converts, followers, and disciples of The Way, Jesus chose 70 people and commissioned them — gave them a special blessing and sent them out — into the countryside to bring the message of the Good News that the Kin-dom of God was very near.

These 70 disciple missionaries were given clear and strict instructions. First of all, find a partner. Everyone pair up. Second, you have no time to pack. Don't go back home to grab your walking stick or even an extra set of clothes. In fact, don't even bring your purse or pocket change. Oh, and kick off your sandals. You're going barefoot.

And remember this is an urgent mission and each of you has a specific place you must go. On your way there, don't stop for small talk and pleasantries — just keep moving. When you get to the town, stop by a house and bless them with peace. If they welcome you and offer you food, don't fuss about what they're serving. No time for dietary purity laws. Just tell them the Good News, heal the sick people, and let them know that the Kin-dom of God has come near. If you knock on the door and they slam it in your face — no worries, no loss. Shake the dust off your feet and move on to the next place.

Why such haste? Well, there's a great harvest out there, and if we don't reap it soon, it's going to spoil.

Among other things, the story of the “Mission of the 70” is a lesson about finding abundance when you believe you are surrounded by scarcity. Great abundance is out there and it is in here. And it is too easy and too tempting to miss or dismiss that abundance because scarcity is the cousin of despair, and despair can loom large and cause an eclipse. Yes, we can look around us and see only the scarcity of resources, of love and hope and joy, even a scarcity of God. But looking through the false lens of scarcity blocks out our glimpse of the hyper-abundance of all these things that *are* around us and within us.

The laborers sent out into the plentiful harvest must be able to see the abundance that is there and faithfully care for that abundance. So, the call to be laborers for the harvest is a call to stewardship. The call to stewardship requires that we recognize scarcity but look beyond it, focusing the eyes of our hearts on abundance. The laborer has to be able to see abundance where others see scarcity. As it was for the 70 missionary disciples, so it is for us.

Scarcity to these 70 disciples looks like a long, risky, uncertain journey with no provisions, no money, no shoes, and no guaranteed lodging or food. The roads could be dangerous, from wild animals at night to bandits by day. If they go from house to house to house and no one welcomes them in and feeds them, then the disciples could go hungry. They had nothing to fall back on!

But abundance to these 70 disciples looks like not going alone: they have a partner and companion in mission. It means traveling light so they are unencumbered by possessions and can move quickly. Abundance means that they are compelled to rely on God through the hospitality and generosity of others. Abundance means that there are endless chances to share the Good News and proclaim the Kin-dom of God.

Scarcity for our Beloved Community looks like the uncertainty and anxiety of leadership and identity transition while living in an uncertain and anxious world. It looks like focusing on who is not here. Scarcity looks like a tight budget with no endowment, no massive savings account, no wealthy patron to fall back on for funding.

But abundance — oh, abundance! — abundance for our Beloved Community looks like the excitement of new opportunities and the continued shaping of who we are and who we are becoming. It looks like the people who *are here* and whose presence strengthens us. It looks like the dedicated and faithful engagement of so many of us in so many ways. Abundance looks like the inspiring generosity evidenced by our pledge giving and special missions offerings. Abundance looks like this covenanted journey with God that we continue to walk together — though the road is risky, and we are without our purse or our shoes.

Those 70 disciples who were sent out? They could've surrendered to scarcity; surrendered to the reality that the journey would be risky, that they didn't have what they needed, that they were unsure if they would be welcomed, or fed, or heard by those they encountered. For the 70 disciples, surrendering to scarcity would mean staying home, choosing not to answer God's call, choosing to let the great, ripe harvest of the Good News to go to spoil. For our Beloved Community, surrendering to scarcity would mean — well, it would mean the exact same thing.

But the 70 disciples embraced Jesus's message of abundance and the reality of abundance all around them, and they undertook the work of harvesting. They did not go alone, they accepted that they would be received in some places and not others, they had faith that they would be safe, and fed, and heard. They had this faith, and accepted this commission, and went into the fields to harvest this abundance because they believed in the power of their mission: to proclaim the Good News of the Kin-dom of God. And I firmly believe that it is much the same for us here.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...”¹

Let me tell you about the harvest that’s out there waiting for us. There is a plentiful harvest growing and grown and ready and waiting. It is a harvest of the Good News that God became flesh and dwelt among us and dwells among us and within us still. It is the harvest of steadfast love and the gift of God’s grace and forgiveness. It is the harvest of wide, radical welcome; the harvest that — when you taste it — fills you with the truth that you are seen and cared for by God, born perfect and whole, known since the time you were knit together in the womb. It is the harvest of the peace that passes all understanding; the harvest that flourishes and feeds off justice, whose bright blooms shine out and show us that another world is not only possible: it is happening now, and we are helping to make it happen. It is a harvest of hope: hope that overcomes despair, hope that banishes fear, hope that allows — even compels, even demands! — us to witness abundance when we are tempted by scarcity. This is the plentiful harvest that is out there, urgently needing to be gathered.

But we’re not done. Going out and gathering the harvest is just one part. I don’t want you to think that we’re supposed to go out into this plentiful harvest, cut it down to the roots, bring it back here and hoard it all for ourselves, and let it rot in our quaint Hilltown white-clapboard silo. No, no! The whole point of gathering this harvest is so that it can be shared. Yes, go ahead and eat your fill of the harvest: after all, Jesus did tell the 70 missionary disciples that “the laborer deserves to be paid.”² But there are people besides ourselves that need to be fed. The harvest needs to be shared.

Whether you know it or not, you are already gathering and sharing the harvest. We share the bounty of this harvest the moment we depart these doors, when our time of worship is over and our service begins. And we must continue to share our harvest with all who we encounter whose empty stomachs growl and whose spirits wither from scarcity; share with them the abundant harvest of God’s presence, invitation and welcome, belonging and inclusion, wholeness and justice, radical peace, stubborn hope, contagious joy, and steadfast love. And through sharing this plentiful harvest, we are sowing the seeds that will produce a future harvest.

You are the laborers that have been sent out into the plentiful harvest. When you go out from this place today, take notice of the plentiful harvest all around you and within you. Consider what you have harvested. Go out and gather the harvest still standing in the field. Share that harvest with those who are hungering. And sow the seeds of Good News and the Kin-dom of God so that the plentiful harvest will take root, be nurtured and nourished, grow and thrive and be gathered and shared and sowed again.

Amen.

¹ Luke 10:2

² Luke 10:7b