

November 13 2022

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

Join the Harvest

Psalm 107:21-22, 36-38

“Let them thank the Lord for God’s steadfast love.

For God’s wonderful works to humankind.

Let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices

and tell of God’s deeds with songs of joy.”

“There God lets the hungry find a home.

There God helps establish a community to live in.

There they sow fields, plant seeds & harvest the yield.”

Matthew 9:35-38

*“Then Jesus went about all the communities,
teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the good news
of God’s kingdom and curing every disease and sickness.*

*When he saw the crowds he became filled with compassion
because they were harassed and helpless, like a flock seeking
a shepherd. Turning to his disciples, Jesus said, ‘The harvest
is plentiful but the laborers are few. Ask the Lord of the
harvest to recruit laborers to bring in the harvest.’”*

We certainly find ourselves in the SEASON of harvest.
But we also find ourselves in a DAY of harvest.
The season is for the crops. Today is to harvest our faith.
And both were meant to inform each other.
Because back in the time of Jesus,
harvesting crops always meant harvesting faith.

Let me explain.

Here in our New England climate,
we're thankful for ONE main harvest per year.
But back in Jesus' time & nice Mediterranean climate
there were 3 harvests per year - spring, summer and fall.
And, with each harvest, people HAD TO tithe!
It wasn't an option, it was an obligation - a tax of 10%.
When Paul said, "*pay taxes to whom taxes are due*"
it's because he was raised to believe in tithing.

So, my dear congregational brothers and sisters,
count yourself lucky we only have a pledge drive
ONCE A YEAR!
And that you can give freely and completely out of faith.

At any rate,
Jesus and the Jews tithed 3 times a year.
And those tithes were divvied up
in different ways over the course of 7 years.
But basically there was one tithe for the poor,
there was another tithe for the temple and temple workers,
and the 3rd tithe was for the Lord - a pure, unadulterated

thanksgiving offering to God.

And almost always, a big fun religious holiday went with it!

Our annual pledge drive every year rolls all 3 purposes of those ancient tithes into one annual pledge.

That is why I call today, a harvest of faith.

Our time, our talents, our wealth and opportunities should always be attached to our faith in God.

Now, most of us here today are not farmers.

& modern farming bears little similarity to ancient farming.

So I want to familiarize us with those 3 steps of ancient farming which are celebrated by the writer of psalm 107.

There they sow fields, plant seeds & harvest the yield

The 1st step is sowing.

Picture a person - woman or man -

with a large bag of seed over their shoulder.

Picture them walking a field scattering that seed over bare ground, and wafting around in the breeze, landing on a variety of soil,

intermingled with a variety of other plants.

Also picture birds - lots of hungry birds!

Over and over,

one of Jesus' favorite spiritual metaphors was sowing.

He used it to represent persons seeking God.
Those hoping to believe in a power higher than themselves.
Sowing was an act of hope:
hoping to find a new life to replace the old one.
Hoping to discover healing & blessing
and repent of old ways.
Sowing was like Jesus' famous line:
*"Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find,
knock and the door shall be opened unto you."*

But there's often a scattered-ness to sowing.
A hap-hazard-ness. A keep-your-fingers-crossed attitude.
It reminds me of why so many Americans were buying
lottery tickets last week.
There's a scattered but powerful hope behind each ticket.
I felt it as I purchased my first lottery ticket in my life!

Many people conduct their church-shopping,
or start reading the bible,
or take up studying new religions
and trying new spiritualities
with the heart of a sower.
Indeed, it might be fair to say
every election is a spiritual act of sowing.

I think most people are in sowing mode -
scattering seeds and hoping they will take root.
And, if they don't find it in churches they find it elsewhere.
And some people spend their whole lives as sowers!

But many sowers neglect to take that next step. PLANTING.

Planting in ancient Judaism was very different from sowing.
As scattered as was sowing, planting was specific.
As generalized as was sowing, planting had guidelines.
Planting called for toil on behalf of the planter,
whereas sowing was on a wing and prayer.

And, most of all, the purpose of planting was to TAKE ROOT.

Next Sunday we shall be welcoming new members;
well, spiritually speaking - joining a church is like planting.
You commit. You settle in. You pitch in.
You pick up a shovel and start digging.
You give your labor, break a sweat and become
as The Epistle of James proclaims:
"A doer of the word and not hearer only."

Yes, planting emphasizes what a person does.
But planting is, at the same time, a confidence in what
God does too.

*For farmers faith is not abstract - some ritual or magic act.
But real as the out-of-doors. He plants the seeds and God rewards.*

After sowing, and after planting, at last comes the harvest.
The first two steps are individual,
the last - harvesting - is communal.

Nowadays, a single farmer driving a huge combine can harvest a huge field in a single day.

But back in Jesus' day, harvesting was a group effort, which is why Jesus said,

“Ask the Lord of the harvest to recruit laborers to bring in the harvest.”

Picture a crew of “reapers” -

each with a finely sharpened sickle and skill in cutting.

Following the reapers are the binders;

those who wrapped the fallen wheat into sheaves.

Then the sheaves were brought to the threshing room, a large circular space with very hard dry floor.

There numerous people would beat the seeds free from the stalks with an assortment of beating tools.

Sometimes oxen were used to plod over the sheaves.

But the point is, it took a community to do a harvest, each doing their own part and believing in the whole to be more than the sum of their parts.

Blessed by the power of God's Holy Spirit, the harvest is the venue of a miracle:

a miracle of enlargement and multiplication as affirmed by Jesus:

*The Harvest is plentiful,
though the laborers are few.*

Congregationalism - more than any other denomination
in Christendom - lives out harvesting.

Because no other denomination survives and thrives
according to those 3 farming strategies:
sowing, planting and harvesting.

And this morning,

we believe that same miracle will occur.

Thanks to this community of faith,
the harvest will be plentiful.

So come dear friends - join in the harvest

Thanks for our 3 testimonials

- 1. Outsider Voice - John Hill*
- 2. New Comers Voice - Elmy. Cannett*
- 3 Long-term Voice - Kit Wallace*

Prayer of Pastoral Care for November 13, 2022

Psalms 98 proclaims make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things. In peace, let us pray to the Lord, following the words, God of compassion, saying **hear our prayer.**

Merciful and Compassionate God, our salvation in whom we trust, you who are eternal, know our daily joys and sorrows and give us grace to bring our needs before you. We pray for pastors and teachers and all the people who lead your church. Inspire them with your Holy Spirit and help the church's faithful to uphold them. God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for elected officials and for all civil servants. Stir them to heed justice, and rouse the church along with other citizens to hold them accountable.

We give our thanks that the election this past week was conducted with safety and integrity, and without threats of intimidation or violence. We give thanks that to date there has been an acceptance of the results by all sides.

May democracy continue to thrive and grow in the years ahead.

God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who suffer the violence of war and human hands.

We pray for the people of Ukraine and those in all places of violent conflict

We pray for veterans of all wars on this day. We honor their service, and especially Remember those who have died that others might live. We pray for an end to warfare as a means to achieve peace both within and between nations and peoples.

We also lift up those young and old who suffer from violence in their homes, and in their neighborhoods and streets. We thank you for all who care for victims.

God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

On this Stewardship Sunday, O God, we pray for the well-being of all in this church; for our joint support of one another and for our partnership in the ministry and outreach of your compassion to all in need. Renew within each of us the joy of loving and serving our neighbor. ...

God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We lift before you those on this church's critical care list.

We pray in gratitude and in hope, through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

OFFERING

Let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God, with gratitude and praise.

Anthem

*DOXOLOGY and PRAYER O God, we thank you for your goodness, and we praise you for your bountiful works, through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.