

July 28, 2019
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

First Presbyterian Church
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HEAVY HARVEST – HELP WANTED

Luke 10:1-12

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near." I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

Prayer for illumination

God of extravagant grace, may your Spirit refresh our hearts through the reading of the scriptures that we may perceive all the good we can do for Christ and so grow in our faith toward our Lord Jesus. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

A certain man while driving home saw a group of young children selling Kool-Aid on a corner in his neighborhood. They had posted the typical hand-scrawled sign over their stand: "Kool-Aid, 10 cents." Not only was he thirsty, he was intrigued. He pulled over to the curb. A young man approached his car and asked if he would like strawberry or grape Kool-Aid. He placed his order and handed the boy a five dollar bill. After much deliberation, the children determined he had some change coming and rifled through the cigar box until they realized they didn't have enough to make the change. The man (feeling magnanimous), told the kids to keep the change, and that he appreciated the curb service so he could enjoy his

Kool-Aid in his car, with the AC running, listening to NPR. But the man could not help notice that one boy stood by the side of the car. Soon the boy asked if He was finished drinking. "Just about," said the man. "Why?" The boy answered "That's the only cup we have, and we need it to stay in business." (1)

It's difficult to operate a Kool-Aid business if you only have one cup. We sometimes make that mistake in the church.

Although in communion we drink from one cup, there is a vast reservoir from which we may fill our cups and, in-turn, fill the cups of others in claiming the high calling of God through Christian service, sharing, work, witness, and ministry.

Have you ever felt overwhelmed? More to accomplish than hours available to achieve? More obstacles to endure than any human could overcome? Have you ever felt busier than a one-eyed cat watching three mice holes. Busier than a one-armed paper hanger with poison ivy? Have you ever had more items on the list of things to do than ways allowable to get at them?

We get the sense that Jesus experienced the same sentiment: The harvest is so great but the laborers so few.

Today as we focus our attention on the myriad of tasks before the church -- The many things for us to do; we may be prompted to say with our Lord: The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. If nothing else, the ministry of Christ's church should reveal to us there indeed is a heavy harvest at hand, and help is wanted.

We are not a business enterprise. Our motive is not a more impressive bottom line. Our goal is not to enhance institutional pride. Our aim is not to be the biggest and the best. The fact of the matter is, there are persons outside the walls of this church who are confused, angry, hurting, dying. There are families that are disintegrating, young minds being destroyed, old folks feeling forgotten. The need is almost overwhelming. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The question, then, is, where are the laborers? Where are those committed to being the body of Christ in ministry to the world? Where are those who will point their family, their friends and their associates to the One who can satisfy their needs in all circumstances for now and eternity? Can we count ourselves in that number?

REINFORCEMENTS

The New Testament lesson is the familiar story of Jesus sending out the seventy disciples on missions of healing and hope. He sent them out in twos, perhaps to reinforce one another, to correct and complement their individual understandings, and to hold before one another the image of the Christ. They were to go to towns where Jesus was about to go and proclaim peace and the arrival of the kingdom. What a grand charter and calling! It is the same charter, calling, and commissioning our lord lays before each and every one of us today.

It is an exceedingly "Can do" proposition when we collectively put forth our efforts, and pool our abilities to engage in common service and do so in a spirit of cooperative reinforcement

rather than caustic competition so prevalent in the other places we live and move and have our being.

Let's face it, the job of serving God is too big for us to handle alone. We rely on God to guide us and to raise up followers so that God's work will be done. God does not ask us to build the kingdom by ourselves. Far from it. God gives Christ to us, and gives us to one another, for partnership in the gospel. We work with a sense of community and with a sense of sacred purpose.

God does not always call the qualified, but God qualifies the called. God does not call us to accomplish miracles. God does call us to be diligent workers, doing our tasks creatively and willingly as a part of the whole, active, vital church.

God's work is not always tangible. Much of what we do as Christians is like planting seeds, with no guarantee that we will witness the harvest. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. But it enables us to do something, and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

CONCLUSION

Like the seventy disciples in today's Lesson, we have listened to the Word of God spoken through Jesus Christ. Like the seventy disciples in today's Lesson, we are sent out now to make a difference in the world -- not by imitating the wolves of force and violence and coercion, but by imitating the Lamb of Love. As we respond together in faith, we may craft our work into a living celebration of God's grace. Discipleship is not drudgery. As we labor with God and for God, we may laugh and sing and dance out the shape of God's kingdom.

As disciples of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, -

(Heze Simmons begins his presentation....)

Closing Prayer

O God, like fishers who toil all night in vain over a sea brimming with fish, sometimes we live unaware of joy, possibility, and blessing. The abundant harvest eludes our grasp. In this hour help us to recognize Jesus' presence, to accept his gifts, and to join him in service. Amen