

“Christ has No Hands but Ours”

Matthew 9:35-10:1 & 28:18-20

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Harvest time was the most important and urgent time on my family’s dairy farm. Every year the animals would eat approximately 1,500 tons or 3 million pounds of haylage. Our haylage mainly came from four harvests of Alfalfa. The biggest harvest was in early June. It was a critical time for the survival of our farm. Unless alfalfa is harvested at its prime, feed quality plummets as well as milk production, therefore profitability. The alfalfa is cut then needs to dry in the field for 1-3 days before being gathered, chopped, and stored. If it gets rained on or harvest is delayed by as little as 2 days, the crop is often ruined.

We prepared for the harvest in winter making sure all of our equipment was repaired, properly maintained, and in top condition. We purchased extra parts for any part that frequently needed repair. Our entire extended family and friends would take vacation to help with the harvest or would rush to the field as soon as their employers would let them. Harvest-support businesses extend their hours to help the farmers. Meals were eaten while driving tractor. Sleep was a luxury that waited until it rained. If you wanted to talk to us, you had to sprint along side a moving tractor and hop on and yell over the noise while harvest continued. Even Leslie, a city girl, realized that a date during harvest time was a ride on a tractor. After we were engaged, a date was waving to each other as our tractors past each other in the field. All our resources, all our energy, everything we had, was put into harvesting the crop.

Jesus’ words describe an enormous opportunity that may not be apparent to those who have not been involved in a harvest. Jesus says, **Matthew 9:37-38 “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into God’s harvest.”** Jesus’ metaphor demands immediate action and commitment by all of us. We are called to serve together bringing our skills, energy and every resource we have to the harvest. Each of us has ministries to do that reveal the love of God. We grow in love and spirit by missionary action. Jesus calls us to be moved with compassion, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, educating children, housing the homeless, bringing joy to the despairing, hope to the cynical, abundant life to the burnt out, belonging to the lonely, and love to those alone and afraid. The plentiful harvest, a world of people seeking God’s rejuvenating love, requires commitment, immediate action, and daily attention.

Explore with me our scripture, so we can understand the harvest and our role as a laborer. Jesus goes out into all the villages, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus goes everywhere and sees everyone. Jesus cures every disease. In Jesus time if you had a disease you were considered unclean, an outcast, and undesirable. Often the sick were banished into the countryside. The harvest is people; all people, even the outcast and foul people, people we do not like, people we disagree with, even our enemies. Jesus loved and reached out to all people. We are to do the same.

Jesus saw people. Our calling as harvesters begins when we start truly seeing people. This might seem like a no-brainer; yet, clearly, the church has a long history of not being able to see the harvest, the needs of others. Sometimes this can be attributed to a church functioning in survival mode, or maintenance mode, and cannot seem to get to mission mode. We are to be

cautious that we do not become too busy taking care of ourselves that we forget about others. Sometimes we don't see the hungry family depending on our donations to the food shelf. Sometimes we don't see the guest youth who is counting on your gift to inspire them at workcamp. Sometimes we don't see the bright future of a child educated by Remember Niger. Sometimes we don't see the family that will make the world's future better now that they have shelter, a house provided by housing for Haiti. Sometimes we don't see all the lives improved by the many ministries of One Great Hour of Sharing. Sometimes we don't see the lives sustain through chaos by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Sometimes we don't see how our gift to the Cowern School anti-bullying program, protected a child, that is inspired to be a teacher, empowering minds, who will solve the world's future problems. Sometimes we don't see the job secured by the clothing donated through the Dayton Clothing Center. Sometimes we don't see the relief of the caregiver and the delight of the client through The Gathering. Sometimes we don't see how our community is being improved by school tools and undie Sunday drives, by Minnesota Interfaith Coalition on Affordable Housing, by peacemaking programs, by the many groups we host in this building. Sometimes we don't see how Presbyterian Clearwater Forest empowers people with the beauty of God's creation. Sometimes we don't see how women are empowered through the array of Presbyterian Women ministries. Sometimes we don't see the seeds and livestock that make a village self-sufficient through Heifer International. Sometimes we don't see how our smile, a kind word, a listening ear brightens someone's attitude, improving their family interaction, that positively ripples through the community. Our service to God in harvesting, in spreading joyful love begins when we see people.

Jesus truly saw everyone. He saw everything about them. And it made Jesus sick. The English states, Jesus, "had compassion for them" but if we examine the Greek the meaning is to be churned to the core of one's being, to love from the heart. Jesus is talking about much more than intellectually acknowledging or emotionally feeling the suffering and needs of others. Jesus is experiencing what these people are going through, bearing with them and he is compelled to alleviate it.

When was the last time you identify with the needs of others to the point that it made you ill? If it's been a long time, or never, then you are too withdrawn from the world, cocooned, sheltered, and protected from the needs of others. Jesus is calling us to see the people around us, to be aware of their situation and connect them to God's love.

Jesus saw that they were "harassed and helpless." These are weak translations of the Greek. Jesus used graphic words meaning skinned, cast down, wounded, and thrust down to the ground. The people are in such dire condition, because they do not have Jesus the Good shepherd to love them, care for them, and lead them. They are sheep without a shepherd. They are confused, anxious, and hungry. They need someone to lead them to green pastures and still waters. So this is the harvest. Odd-looking sheep that don't look alike, think alike, or smell alike. They are in serious hurt. Their souls feel like they have been skinned alive. They are raw and sensitive. They need the love and good news of the gospel. They need a savior. Jesus declares it is time to gather up the broken lives of these people—the harvest—that there is great need for you to do the gathering.

Compassion begins by listening. Many people want to know that we care before they care what we know. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve." Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.

Jesus continues to call, prepare, and send disciples, that's us, out into the world to love people. Jesus has equipped and empowered us with the Holy Spirit to go out into the world with

life transforming extravagant love. How are you going to participate in the harvest? How is this church going to go out and do it?

A struggling church got news that a 250-unit apartment complex was going to be squeezed into the land right behind them, so they would share a property line. Their pastor said he had two conversations within three hours. The first individual said, "We need to build a fence so their kids don't wander onto our property and get a security system. Perhaps we need to hire night security to protect our church." The second person asked, "Can we get the money to build a sidewalk and steps up to our church, so they can come to our ministries? Can we turn all our lawn into a playground for children and a skating park for the teenagers? How can we open up our building and provide support and programs to meet their needs."

Soon we will likely host El Shaddai New Hope Ministries. Will we truly see them and have compassion for them? Will we open wide our building? Will we worship with them and partner with them in lovingly serving our community.

Dennis Folds recalls a statue of Jesus in London. The city had been devastated by the bombings during World War II. After the war, a group of German students, through kindness and love and a deep desire to return Christian love to those who had lost so much, volunteered to go to London to help rebuild an English cathedral that had been severely damaged by their country. As work progressed, they became greatly concerned about a large statue of Jesus, whose arms were outstretched and beneath which was the written inscription from Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." The volunteers had great difficulty trying to restore the hands, which had been completely destroyed. Finally, after much work and discussion, they decided to let the hands of Jesus remain missing. They changed the written inscription to read: "Christ has no hands but ours."

Recently I read an article that said our greatest idol today is fear. Fear of differences. Fear that if we share our stuff, it will wear out or that we might not have enough later. Fear that our way of thinking will not be the dominate way of our country. Fear to love, because we will get hurt. Fear that our beliefs about God will not be shared by the majority. Fear to share our faith. Fear hampers are ability to see people. Fear disperses compassion. Fear judges. Fear causes one to run away from the harvest.

How is Jesus calling you personally to the harvest? Do you need to grow in seeing people, grow in listening, grow in compassion, grow in sharing, and grow in love? Let us start right now. Picture one person who you will love more. It could be a family member, co-worker, classmate, or someone you hardly know. Picture that person in your mind. When can you listen to them? How will you show your compassion for them? How can you embody God's love for them? How will you pray for them? How will you be so joyful, generous and loving that they ask you, "Why are you serving me?" Then share your faith journey. Tell them how God is the one who calls, empowers, and inspires you to love. Then invite them to worship with you. Pray with them. Love them. The harvest is plentiful. Jesus has no hands but yours? Amen