

“Each to the Assigned Task”

Matthew 9:35 -10:8

Grant us wisdom in understanding your word and grant us courage to obey what you want us to do. Amen.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The metaphor of the harvest is a very interesting imagery if spoken to a rural and agricultural community in Asia and Africa but not fully to large scale farming in North America. I had opportunities to talk to farmers in Canada and also took a tour of John Deere, a leading factory of farm equipments in Moline. Illinois. The farm in Canada was so huge that you cannot even see where the farm ends if you stand from where it begins. The tools they were using were intimidating – big machines whose wheels alone make any 5 foot person a dwarf when standing beside it. It was a highly mechanized farm in fact they use specially equipped planes to spray their crops. But despite those massive equipments made by John Deere they spoke about how difficult their life was as a farmer. They spoke not about the problem of harvesting but more so with paying their loans and keeping the land which were handed to them from generation of farmers. I also shared about what I knew on a typical farm in the Philippines and they were also surprised on a different set of concerns that farmers face in our country.

Farming is one of the oldest and noble professions. People had to master techniques in tilling the land to raise food to feed families and in order to survive. Without able farmers civilizations will crumble. With the unbelievable price of rice today worldwide, governments are talking about food security and its impact to peace and order. It is not a far fetch scenario that there will be massive unrest worldwide if people have nothing to eat. Jesus use of the metaphor of the harvest and the laborers is a powerful reminder to his direct listeners and also to us who needs to expand a little bit of our imagination to capture the essence of what he was talking about.

The context of Jesus statement' has to do with the preaching of the good news about God's rule and reign on earth. Matthew used the term the Kingdom of Heaven. The proclamation of the kingdom involves addressing the daily needs of the people. For Jesus the task was a combination of teaching and healing ministries. While he spoke about God's love, he also demonstrated what God's love was all about by responding to the needs of the times.

Disease of all kinds was the primary concern of the people. Disease was not thought of as pure physical ailment. They were manifestations of the power of evil. The mindset was not about virus or bacteria or whatever medical term that we use today. It is about spiritual battle of the forces of death and the power of life. Jesus came into the picture as the one who proclaims and proves to the people that power of life is greater than the power of death. That God's love and compassion is more potent than the devil's desire to seek destruction and eventually cause death and decay. Jesus words and presence was a rebuke and a sharp contrast to anything and to anybody who wanted to prevent God's rule and reign to fully bloom and blossom here in earth.

So when the Bible speaks about calling people beginning with Abraham and Sarah to the disciples and all of us today. It implies proclamation in words and in deeds not only about who God is but also about what God do with life in the here and now. Situations may change but the substance of the calling remains the same. Issues differs depending on the where God puts us but the response required of us is constant.

Using the metaphor of the harvest, Jesus is inviting us to have a sense of perspective as we confront the world, wherever and whatever we do.

First, *Jesus invites us to view the world as one great opportunity.* I believe that our perception of the world is crucial to our response. I remember a friend who asks, "What is your opinion about people?" He said there are those who see them as a problem. So they hate people, they don't want to get involve. Every time they encounter people what they hear are problems and complains. But

there are those who view them as money. When they see people they see them as potential buyers, so they get excited when they know that there are a lot of people in a particular area. He also said that politicians love people during elections because they see them as possible voters. Social research is used not just to determine the buying habits but also of the voting patterns people in a particular place or category. Have you wondered why you receive lot of junk mails? You are being profiled according to your taste and choices. People consider you as opportunity.

Our perspective determines our action, our response. Jesus invites us to take a look at people and at the world not as a threat but one great opportunity, like a field about to be harvested. Listen to the language not just of our leaders and of anybody and you will have a sense of their perspective on how they view the world and how they view people. Diplomats are very careful with their use of words. Military officers use a different language. A lot of people prefer to view others as enemies and competitors. This perspective has its own set of defined responses. Christ invites us to a different worldview – a one that looks at anybody in need of love and compassion as an opportunity. This is how he viewed the world and the people the dwells in it. Matthew took note of Jesus perspective in v. 36. He wrote, *When Jesus (he) saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* This is where the verse prior to the metaphor of the harvest. Remember at one point when the disciples were horrified when people keep following them. They said, “*Send them away, Master.*” They were thinking about the logistics of feeding. Jesus always takes a different view – the sense of compassion in his heart makes him see people as opportunity and never as a threat.

Second, *invites us to have that sense of urgency in our life.* Farming whether traditional or one using high tech tools does not eliminate the sense of the urgency of the harvest. When the field is ripe, one cannot postpone and say, ‘*harvesting will be done tomorrow.*’ You harvest or you lose your crops.

In like manner, when there is a need respond to the need right there and there. Do not wait for tomorrow. Actually, tomorrow never

comes. Two months ago, the girls (Gangging and Debbie) discovered that a store in Jamaica was selling cheap materials for curtains, table runners and other stuff for clothing, if you see curtains in the parsonage that's the result of that craze. The store owner was very clever. He put a sign outside declaring "Closing out Sale, Everything Must Go." One of the workers said that they will close at the end of the month. So they came back and buy again. After a month the store was still there selling the same items. Then I noticed that there are other stores putting up the same kind of sign – "Closing Out Sale, Everything Must Go." Believing that nothing will be left tomorrow because the store was about to close and was selling at a prize they believe was cheap – the girls a substantial amount of cloth that were shipped to the Philippines in oversized box.

We know the sense of urgency in other areas of our life but we've got to embrace it when it comes to responding to the needs of others as we proclaim God's rule and reign. When God gives you an opportunity take it with a sense of urgency.

Charles Jones wrote: "A sense of urgency is that feeling that lets you know that yesterday is gone forever, tomorrow never comes. Today is in your hands. It lets you know that avoiding today's task will add to wasted yesterdays and postponing today's work will add to tomorrow's burden. The sense of urgency causes you to accomplish what today sets before you. Thank God for the sense of urgency that can change a dull, shabby existence into a sparkling life."

Finally, *listen and follow the instruction of the Lord of the harvest*. One of the things I like with this metaphor is that it reminds us that we are not the owners of the field, we are the workers. The world and the people that dwell in it is the Lord's. This is what Psalms 100 points to us. The KJV is more poetic in tone: *Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture*. Often times some people act as if they are the owners of the field. We also do it at times. It is worthwhile to remember that the world is the Lord's field. And eventually, the Lord decides on what to do with field. One of the practices of the Old Testament

is to not to harvest the field fully, owners intentionally left some for the widows and the orphans. This is the judgment call of the owner.

When there was a strong earthquake that caused massive tsunami in Asia, a lot of stories were remembered on how people were warned and survived such calamity. One story was about a Japanese farmer whose workers were harvesting the crop on the mountain. In the middle of the task they felt the earth moved. When it was over they saw that the waters on the ocean below receded. The farmer knew that many people in the plains below will die when the tsunami will hit the land. So he ordered his workers to burn the fields as fast as they could. The crops were just as good as it can be but the order was given – burn the fields. When people saw the flames they ran to the hills with the idea of helping putting off the fire. And just on time when they reached the hills, the waters came crushing and destroying everything along its path. The crop was lost but the fire served as call that warned and saved so many lives that day. Owners decide what to do with the harvest and as workers we are required to listen and follow the orders.

During Jesus time and in traditional agricultural places, harvest time is a community event. Each has a role to perform. Some may not be on the field because hands are needed to cook food for the workers. Some are assigned to do the threshing and others to put the harvest on the bags. Some are called to lay the grains on the ground to make it dry and ready to pounded or milled. Each of us have a role to play, each of us assigned to a certain task but all part of the harvest.

The Lord of the harvest knows the whole scenario. The Lord of the harvest knows what to do. We have problems when we act as if we are the lord of the harvest or when we do the task assigned to others and left the things undone that were assigned to us. Harvest time is a time of joy and excitement. It's a great opportunity to know other workers and to enjoy the moment. Harvest time reminds us of that sense of urgency of a crop so ripe, like the inexhaustible needs around us that wait our immediate and quick response. Harvest time reminds us of the fields where we are called

to be workers. Jesus invites us to look at our tasks and our lives like a harvest, like working for the Lord who owns the field. Today is harvest time, let's go and work and do the task assigned to us.

5th Sunday after Pentecost
June 15, 2008

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June 15, 2008 – 1:30 P.M.

Preacher: Rev. Reuben D. Cedino
Sermon: "Each to the Assigned Task"

SCRIPTURE READING:

Epistle: Romans 5: 1-8

Gospel: Matthew 9: 35 - 10:8

Liturgist: Ms. Alfa M. Garcia
Pianist: Mr. Noel P. Rivera III
Organist and Choral Director: Ms. Rachel A. Dadap

Ms. Rachel Dadap, *Elder-in-Charge*
Tim and Jing Mecerido, *Ushers*
Ms. Lily Manalo, *Steward-in-Charge*
Mr. Sonny Manalo, *Trustee-in-Charge*