

Psalm 85:8-13

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

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.

Sermon

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” When you take this sentence and apply it to stewardship, it is easy to connect the harvest with the offering, the pledges, the money. Because isn't that what stewardship season is all about? Asking for money and hoping to get more than last year, enough to pay the bills, maybe some to do some new and wonderful things. And being really truthful, that is where we are as a church. We need more than we have been getting.

The finance team meet just this past week to strategize about how to minimize our spending for the rest of this year in hopes to shrink our income to expense deficit. We are asking all our teams and leaders to do their part in keeping expenses low for these last three months. And we are all hoping that you, as a whole, can help through your promises for the new year that will be taking up next week on our Harvest Festival Sunday. These are real needs, real concerns, and real hopes.

But I would be negligent as a pastor if I told you that the harvest that Jesus is talking about is a harvest of money. In fact, the harvest that Jesus is speaking about is one that does not involve a purse or bag or wallet or credit card. No, this harvest is a harvest of people, a harvest of lives who are hungry and eager for some good news of Christ's love and healing and forgiveness. Jesus called the first disciples to follow him, and he would make them fishers of men. Now he calls all his disciples and sends them out into the harvest to gather in the men, and the women, and the children. To bring in the harvest of lives that are ripe and ready to receive Christ's good news.

And how does Christ send them out? As lambs. Without power, without money or possessions. He sends them as lambs among wolves. And we wonder why the mainline church struggles in membership and size. No one wants to be a lamb, especially when there are wolves about. The wolves of differing theology, the wolves of secularism, the wolves of rejection, and the wolves of animosity. At least sends us out with a staff to defend ourselves.

Jesus sends out the seventy disciples to go out and look for hospitality, for welcome, for community. He sent them out looking for those who would accept the disciples and in accepting them, they would also accept Christ. And though he sent them out without money or possessions, Jesus did not send them out without power. No, Jesus sends out the disciples with special gifts.

And the first gift that each disciple carries is peace. This is not just a state of being, but this peace is about the welfare of the family and the community and beyond. This is a missional peace, where the disciples are called to help the community be whole and connected. This peace is a peace that unites folks together and holds each person in respect and honor, especially those who are often the least honored.

So here is my request for each of you this week. Take time to consider what God is calling you to give to the church in 2017. Be prepared to offer a pledge of your money next Sunday or in the next few Sunday's so that our leadership can be good stewards of what we will be given and make faithful plans for the new year.

But maybe more important than the financial promise you will make this year, I would like each of you to make a promise to be a laborer in the harvest. How many of you know someone who is not a family member or a member of this congregation? Do we have any hermits here? No. Good. Now how many extroverts do we have? Doing what Jesus asked is hard for all of us, but especially with those of us that didn't raise our hands.

But here is the thing, we don't have to make this complicated or into a large conversation about theology or scripture. But maybe we can simply share with someone a bit about what we liked, "Our choir sang a great song today, it is amazing how music can lift us up." or "I would love to invite you to our church's Chili Supper, you can be my guest." or "The pastor talked about peace in his sermon today that really gave me something more than empty words to live into." This is the good news we have to offer, that we are a community that lifts one another up in love even as we seek to serve our community and the peace of our world.

What would happen if each of us pledged to share our faith and invite someone to come and see what God is doing in and through this congregation. What if we pledged each week to do this with someone we know, or someone we meet at the grocery store, or someone who is new to town? To invite, to share, to be excited about this church and the wonderful people gathered, the wonderful events of fellowship, and the wonderful way we share good news through caring for our community.