



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

July 3, 2016

“The Urgency of the Harvest”

(Luke 10:2)

Rev. David K. Groth

“And he said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few’ (Luke 10:2)

COLLECT: Almighty God, You have built Your Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. Continue to send Your messengers to preserve Your people in true peace that, by the preaching of Your Word, Your Church may be kept free from all harm and danger; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Jesus says the harvest is plentiful, but I've not always seen it that way. Look at the empty chairs. Look at the declining numbers in churches across the country. Moreover, as Christians in America, doesn't it feel like the current we're swimming against is become stronger? Doesn't it feel like suddenly we're on the outside looking in? Doesn't it seem like hearts are growing colder to beliefs and values we cherish?

An example: this last week the Supreme Court handed down another decision in favor of easy access to abortion. When the decision was announced people cheered and laughed and gave one another hugs and high fives and fist bumps. Did they pause to consider what they were celebrating?

Another example, last month we all heard about a gorilla that was shot at a Cincinnati Zoo. A 3 year old boy had somehow climbed into the animal's enclosure, and the gorilla was clearly a threat to the boy. Animal rights groups were crying foul. ABC, CBS and NBC all covered the story. Between the three of them they gave it a surprising 1 hour and 28 minutes and 17 seconds of coverage . . . basically an hour and a half. And yet when ISIS rounded up 21 unarmed Egyptian Coptic Christians, made them kneel, and executed them mob style (because they were Christian), that story got a total of 14 minutes and 30 seconds. An hour and a half for a gorilla. Fourteen minutes for 21 Christians. We are on the outside looking in.

One last example: Careful listeners have noticed that a number of the most influential politicians in America no longer use the phrase "freedom of religion". Rather, they

say “freedom of worship”. It sounds the same, so what’s the big deal? Think about it: “Freedom of worship” confines us and our faith to a space, a place and time where we are free to gather in this sanctuary or in the privacy of our homes in order to worship. That’s good, but it’s not enough. And it’s certainly not the same as freedom of religion, which is a constitutionally protected right to talk about our faith also outside the context of worship, outside the space of this sanctuary, outside our homes. We can talk about our faith with co-workers, and neighbors and in the hospital room and in the public square. The phrase, “Freedom of worship” puts boundaries on us and implies your religion is fine, but you really ought to keep it to yourselves. Georgetown professor Thomas Farr warned, “Those of us in the business of sniffing out rats know that this is a rhetorical shift to watch.” I know I’m drifting from the text, but these things are important particularly as we think about and celebrate our freedoms this weekend. So many sacrificed so much so we could live in freedom. What a gift freedom is, and if not defended, how easily lost!

Things have and continue to change very rapidly in ways not favorable to the faith, but it won’t do to sit around and mope and complain and begrudge the changes. There’s work to do, after all, and it needs to be done right away.

Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” Clearly, this is not about opening the doors and hoping the harvest will somehow magically march in. This is about going out there and gathering in the harvest *while we can*. This is about focusing on mission, before the Lord’s return. This is about working while it is day, before the night comes. When a harvest is ready, there’s a sense of urgency to get it safely in.

I talked to a couple of our farmers about it. Les Moll remembers a year when the corn needed to come in, but the ground was too wet. He could do nothing but wait for the ground to freeze, which he did, but not quite long enough. His harvester broke through the thin freeze line and promptly got stuck in the mud. He had to call a neighbor to pull him

out. Realize farmers are fiercely proud, independent people so that's a phone call no farmer wants to make. Les audibly shuddered as he recalled the incident.

Charles Schadt remembers a time about five years ago. The corn was suffering from stalk rot, but it was ready to be harvested. Just before he got into the fields, "there was a real nice wind storm." Fifty percent of the stalks were lying on the ground, and the harvester itself couldn't get that low to the ground. Charles looked at me and gave me the moral of the story, the moral of the sermon really. "If I had had five hundred people out there picking by hand, one ear at a time, I wouldn't have lost even one cob."

If that's the way it is for a field of corn, how much more so for the mission field! There's a harvest to bring in, and the mission is urgent, and it belongs not to one or two harvesters, but to us all, one treasured person at a time!

Why is this mission so urgent? Next week, the one who needs to hear the Gospel may not be receptive, because, like Pharaoh, he will have hardened his heart once again. Or maybe he won't be around next week, because of a small clot in his leg which is about to dislodge and travel. Maybe you won't be around next week because of your leaded foot. When the harvest is ripe, it cannot wait. It needs to be brought in. And the only way you can do that is by being out there in the field.

Until now, the disciples of Jesus were little more than observers, men who watched and admired but were not yet actively engaged in the work. Many of us never become more than observers. We are content to be spectators. Or worse, we are content to sit back and scrutinize and criticize, and after the service have roast pastor for lunch. But in this text, ready or not, Jesus is thrusting his followers into the fields. Surely they didn't feel up to the task, yet Jesus called them to it, as he does us.

Notice in verse 2 he says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore *pray*" is the command, but don't *just* pray. The very next verse says "Go!"

Remember when he told his followers, "You are the

light of the world”? He did not ask, “Are you in the mood?” or “Would you mind being the light of the world for an hour or two next week?” No. You are the light of the world, throughout the week, every day, in your vocations as a worker, a spouse, a parent, a friend, a citizen. Your assigned fields are where you live and move and have your being. One small but very important field is your family room. Another is your office at work, or the factory floor. Another is at your brother’s house. Another is at the Senior Center, or at the Y.

Harvesting a field is a messy business. If it’s not dusty it’s probably muddy. So also, working with people is a messy business. Do you those Jesus is sending his disciples to are all polite and kind and well-adjusted who share the same values? Or might there be some cutthroats in the crowd, and drug peddlers too, and felons and misfits? “I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.” He’s not just sending them to nice towns that are well policed, but also to the ghettos and projects and apartment buildings whose stairwells smell of urine and are littered with broken glass.

But there are people who live in that building, and children. When Jesus looked at crowds, the Bible often says he had compassion on them. He was looking at their faces, I think, not their history of poor choices and bad decisions. He was looking at their eyes, not their records. We should probably try to do the same.

Just a few verses before this, Jesus sent messengers ahead of him to make preparations in a Samaritan village. But for whatever reason, the people of that village didn’t want Jesus to come. When James and John heard this, they said, “How ‘bout we call fire down on them and turn them into toast?” Jesus didn’t think it was funny. He scolded them. And quote, “They went on to another village.”

That’s another part of this text. Even when rejected, we cannot quit. We cannot stop, cannot give up. We shake the dust off our sandals and move on.

Charles Schadt told me another story. A number of

years ago he was renting a 20 acre field adjacent to the Crawfish River. It was a low lying parcel that tended to be wet. And sure enough, all that fall they were unable to get their equipment in. In fact, it wasn't until New Year's Day that the ground had finally frozen hard enough. Charles was in the combine. His wife Jan was in the tractor pulling a corn hopper. And the golden rule of the day was, whatever you do, don't stop! Because if you stop the equipment will sink down through the ice into the mud. And then they'd have to pick up the phone and call Les Moll's neighbor and ask for help.

Whatever you do, don't stop. That's the key for us as well. The church's mission isn't getting any easier in this country. Resistance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is building. Hearts are hardening. But we must not stop, because people need a Savior from sin and death.

On March 23, 1775 in a speech to the Virginia Convention, Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death." It was a critical moment in our nation's history, and his speech was persuasive. Patrick Henry was passionate about living in a free and independent country. But he was also passionate about another kind of liberty. In his Last Will & Testament, filed in the Brookneal County Courthouse in Virginia, Patrick Henry wrote: "I have now given everything I own to my children. There is one more thing I wish I could give them . . . and that is Jesus Christ. Because if they have everything *I* gave them and don't have Christ, they have nothing."

So it is today. If we have everything but don't have Christ, we have nothing. Conversely, even if we have nothing but have Christ, we are rich beyond measure. He promises, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (Jn. 11:25). He also promises, "I give them eternal life." That's the freedom we yearn for most and that counts the most. That's the freedom that not even the death of thousands on a battle field could earn. It's the liberty that only one man's death could earn, not on a bloody field, but on a bloody cross.

Jesus, God's Son, has earned that liberty for the world, but also for you as an individual. Our constitution with all its guaranteed freedoms . . . life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, cannot liberate us from sin and death and sadness, and doesn't pretend to. But Jesus promised, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn. 8:36).

You are his baptized people, redeemed, forgiven, called into the field. And you are truly free. Thanks be to God.
Amen.

