

Pastor Jon's Sermon from July 3, 2022

“Help Wanted” - Jesus needs workers for the harvest

Help Wanted! You see these signs everywhere in the Fox Valley and throughout the United States. Two people in our family have answered these ads this summer and are now working. Businesses, non-profits, schools, hospitals, and churches need workers and volunteers to function properly. The labor shortage affects all of us... mostly with rising prices and a decrease in customer service.

In our Gospel for today, Jesus needs workers for the harvest.

When I think of the harvest, I think of my first call in Fordville, North Dakota. The Erickson family, parishioners in one of the churches I served, Quale Lutheran, needed an extra pair of hands for the wheat harvest. They were a small family farm. A mom, a dad, and a son did all the work. They had a hard time finding trustworthy workers and needed a laborer for the harvest, so they hired me. One of the fringe benefits was that Dolly was an amazing cook. She fed me. They trained me to drive a big John Deere tractor that pulled a grain cart. I was then trained to drive alongside the combine as James would unload on the fly into the grain cart. We had to get the speed perfect. Once he was empty, he would give me the high sign, and I would run the grain cart over to the semi and unload the wheat. Trust me, I made plenty of mistakes dumping some wheat on the ground. But they had grace for me. The thing I recall most is the sense of urgency to get the crop off the field. The weather could turn at any moment. The moisture content in the wheat mattered for the price. When the weather was good, the wheels had to turn... hence unloading on the fly.

Jesus has sense of urgency to get the harvest off the field too. The harvest is a metaphor for future believers. Jesus needs more laborers to spread his message because the demand will rise. Jesus knows this.

So, he sends out 70 people ahead of him in pairs to every town and place Jesus intended to go to share his message of healing, forgiveness, and hope through his reign on earth. He wants them to find people and

homes that are receptive to his message. And when they are rejected, shake the dust off their feet and move on to the next town.

Who are the 70 Luke is talking about? These aren't the 12 disciples. This is a wider group of followers like you and me. We get a clue that it includes men and women. In 8:1-3. Luke says, "The twelve were with Jesus, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities. Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, and Susanna, and many others provided for them out of their resources." Jesus had a mixed group of vagabonds following him around.

But Jesus tells them this mission won't be easy, "See, I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves"⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.

Would you apply for this job on Indeed.com?

What is Jesus trying to communicate to us followers with this job description? First, he is telling us to travel light. Don't go home to pack a purse or bag. Leave your sandals at home. Greet no one on the road." In other words, it is important to go now... the timing is urgent. Travel light. Isn't it true that the more we have, the more we have to take care of and worry about. Second, they had to learn to be receivers. They had to allow God to care for them through the hospitality of others. It was about trusting in God to provide for them in their precarious state, and to be satisfied with the accommodations they were given. Jesus wants them to be thankful for what they have. They weren't to go looking for a better deal at the house next door just because they could smell fresh cinnamon rolls.

We aren't good at receiving, are we. Many of us are not good at receiving compliments or gifts. We often protest. Our human condition says that we need to go it alone... that you don't need help from others. How many of you have a hard time receiving God's grace? We are really hard on ourselves when we mess up and don't think we deserve grace. Well, I am here today to say you are worthy of God's grace, because God is the giver.

Problem for Jesus in this text is that the Harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

The solution: Jesus partners with us flawed humans to carry out his mission on earth. Imagine that, Jesus partnering with little ole us. Our God is a missionary God... a sending God. The message of Jesus spreads through you and me. As Christians, everywhere we go, we are laborers sent out into the harvest... whether that be at the grocery store, at work, at the campground, 4th of July festival, in school, on the streets, in our homes or neighborhoods. You are a missionary. Jesus trusts you to carry his message of love and healing to the world.

Jesus gives us agency to do this work, ¹⁶“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

¹⁷The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!”

One of my most joyful moments in ministry was harvesting wheat with the Erickson family. I felt like I was rolling over holy ground. May you find joy in your serving... wherever that may be. And may you be content with what you have and learn to see and accept God’s grace and hospitality through others.

Amen