
THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL

I believe in following the instructions given us in the Bible.

- Today, JESUS shares HIS plan for spreading the gospel of GOD's love.
 - His model is to send out seventy-two in pairs to share the good news.
 - So, get a partner...
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We are part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

- "Evangelical" means "gospel" or "good news," being committed to it and to sharing it with others.
 - Inviting others to "come and see" the good news of JESUS.
 - So, how many of you invited someone to come join us today?
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JESUS says today, "The harvest is plentiful."

Today, though, we will probably reach one of two conclusions.

- If we look to statistics about church growth, we're likely going to despair and assume that the harvest has withered on the vine and that our best days are behind us.
 - But if we look to statistics – and to stories – of people in need,
 - then we should realize immediately that there has never been a better time for the church to be the community of JESUS,
 - reaching out in blessing and good news to heal the sick,
 - feeding the hungry,
 - comforting the afflicted,
 - and befriending the lonely.
 - There are more people – quite literally – who need to hear of GOD's grace and be touched by GOD's love than ever before.
 - The harvest is quite plentiful,
 - and we are the people called to be laborers in this harvest.
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Still, perhaps, we should talk a little bit about the whys.

- Why should we invite others to come?
 - Why should we evangelize?
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First, we need to do this because JESUS tells us to do so:

- "Go, make disciples," HE says.
 - "Send out laborers into HIS harvest."
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Second, we need to do this because there are those who will perish if we don't.

- Jesus says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...whoever does not will perish.
 - Do you have family or friends who fall into this second category?
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Third, whenever we witness, we share some of the most wonderful gifts there are...gifts of GOD.

- I want to talk more about them in a minute.
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But let me talk first about the barriers to evangelism—the barriers to sharing the good news with others.

- Actually, the biggest barrier is ourselves and our thinking.

For example, the Golden Rule says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

- But most of us think I don't want someone else telling me what to believe, so, I shouldn't tell anyone else.

Yet, let me ask you, "Where would the world be today if no one told the story of GOD's love in JESUS?"

- Where would you be today if someone didn't tell you? If someone didn't bring you?

Then we have a tendency to think about faith in terms as private vs. public.

- My faith is private and your faith is private and we should be talking it with others.

Instead, we need to think about faith as personal rather than private.

- I have my story of how I came to faith and you have yours,
 - but if we tell each other our stories, we can hear more of how GOD is working in the world and grow in our faith through each other's stories.
 - We should not be keeping it a secret.
 - We should be sharing it.
 - In fact, this week ask someone to tell them their faith story, and then tell them yours.

Let me also clarify a misunderstanding about evangelism.

- When we think about evangelizing, we think about talking.

There's a saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi that can help us.

- "Share the gospel always. If necessary, use words."
- Our example of Christian living and action can be our best witness of our faith, especially in contrast to the world.
 - How we treat others, especially those who might otherwise be ignored or abused, will tell others about what we believe.
 - Of course, when you are asked about why you make those kinds of choices, you will have to answer.

There is a saying that illustrates this.

- Make a friend. Be a friend. Bring a friend to Christ.
- Building relationships can help us bring others to faith.

Simply by living as the Christians we are, we witness to our relationship with GOD.

- This living is shown best by sharing those gifts of GOD I was speaking of a moment ago.
- Witnessing, evangelizing, is really about sharing the gifts of GOD with others,
 - through our actions and our words.

Let me speak now about those gifts.

First is the love of GOD.

- JESUS said, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another."
 - Showing a genuine interest in people is the place to start.
 - Not just seeing them, but seeing into them.
 - Being cross-eyed and recognizing each person as someone for whom JESUS also went to the cross.
 - Letting them know that they are people the world needs—that GOD needs and loves.
 - How we treat others, especially those who have not been treated well, is how we can share the love of GOD.

The second gift is the power of GOD.

- "Heal the sick," JESUS says. "Cast out demons."
- Change lives the way our lives have been changed.
 - How would your life be different if you did not have GOD in your life?
 - You have experienced the power of GOD and you can offer it to others.

The third gift we can offer is the Kingdom of GOD.

- JESUS says, "Tell them that the Kingdom of GOD has come near."

Tony Campolo is a sociologist and public speaker.

- On a trip to Honolulu, he couldn't adjust to the time change, so he went to a nearby coffee shop.
- At 2:00 in the morning, a group of women came in who the owner identified as prostitutes.

"Tomorrow is my birthday," one of them said to the others.

- "So, what do you want? A medal?" another said.
- "I'm just saying," the first replied.

Tony and Harry, the coffee shop owner, hatched a plot.

- The next evening when these women came in, there were decorations and a cake with icing.
- The woman whose birthday it was burst into tears of joy because it had been so long since someone had loved her enough to give her a party.

What kind of Kingdom does GOD offer to the world?

What kind of church do you belong to?

- The kind of church that throws parties for prostitutes?

Not everybody would be comfortable coming to a church like that.

- But some would.
- Some would join a church like that in a heartbeat!

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

- Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.
- Ask the Lord to send you.

Go and let others know, through your actions and your words that the Kingdom of GOD is the love of GOD that accepts others unconditionally,

- that the Kingdom of GOD is the power to change lives.

Go and let others know that you are part of the Kingdom of GOD

- and that this Kingdom has room for everyone, no matter where they've been, no matter where they are, no matter where they are going.

Go, out into the harvest, for the harvest is plentiful.

- And it is just waiting for you to bring it in.