

Sent out

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (OS 14C)

Published in the Ministry District of Yorke Peninsula

Sunday, July 3, 2022

Our Gospel passage this morning begins with the words of Jesus, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

As a country parish, this is an image that we should all be able to relate to. We watch the work of the farmer, ploughing, sowing and the growth, flowering and maturing of the crop until the point of the harvest. (Of course, if I was preaching this in the Northern Hemisphere, this reading would be read with ripening fields all around the church.) So think for the moment of the problem - The harvest is ready, but there is no one to get it in?

In days past, the harvest was not only the culmination of the year, but represented the future, not only the income, but in many rural communities of the third world, the actual food for the community. If the harvest failed or could not be gathered the whole community suffered.

It was the focus of life - the harvest, so when Jesus refers to it, the hearers listened. Indeed, when things were harvested by hand, it was a case of everyone to the fields to ensure that it was got in. Remember the story that Jesus told about the labourers for hire in the Village Square, where even one hour of contribution was important in the process? It helps us to understand the urgency of the time.

And I don't think it is any different now, having seen the process and the anxiety when the harvesters are delayed coming to the peas, potatoes, or poppies. It would be the same for wheat. The delays cost money now.

But the harvest that Jesus is referring to is more important than that of crops. There is a spiritual harvest as well. The kingdom of God is only populated by the activity of the faithful. Like the harvest, there is a need for everyone to lend a hand. Indeed, like the harvest, the harvest of souls should be the prime focus. It is not enough to leave it to the priest alone, but each person of the community should be involved.

Think for a moment? Of the approximately 2,500 Anglicans that God has given us to care for, we average around 170 in church, and if we were honest, we would be hard pressed to say that we had connected with more than 4-500 in any way. What farmer would be satisfied if the harvest that was brought in only represented 8% of that which was there? So why are we content with a spiritual harvest of 8%? Or for that matter a harvest of 3% which is the Australian average. Perhaps we can be satisfied with our work rate when we look at the other churches, but is 8% good enough?

But Jesus not only raises the problem, he offers the solution as well. For the passage describes the sending out of the seventy - Not the 12 disciples who became the apostles, but a larger group. Sent out with these words.

See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals;

Under equipped, under prepared, under trained, but on the mission. Like the harvest the urgency is in doing the job.

Now there is a point to training, and I know from earlier times that I have had the feeling of inadequacy and ill-preparedness particularly with the task of evangelism, but I still have had no training in it (as it is not part theological courses). I do what I do because I have come to the understanding that the most significant way of witnessing is to live a life connected with God and to live in contact with others, so they can see the impact that Jesus makes on your life.

The rest is God's work. The seventy went out to all the towns and villages that Jesus would go to, to prepare the way for Jesus. Our biggest restriction is that we are not prepared to enter the harvest field. I know little about the mechanics of harvesters, but I do know this, if they do not go into the field, they are useless. Going to the field for the spiritual harvest means that we need to move in and amongst those outside the kingdom. My predecessor at Cressy, Father Charles went to the pub for a beer, this was his way of doing it. But it is not just being in the Pub, but the school, the CWA, Landcare, Rotary, Lodge, the football club, the main street wherever we can encounter those not quite in the kingdom. We can only bring in the harvest, when we get out to do so.

And what was the result of this obedience?

Luke goes on to tell us that they returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!"

Our God will honour our endeavour. These things, which seem that they may be beyond us in our human framework, will be achieved because our God is with us.

But there is a warning as well. Jesus said, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven". In the long run, it is not that we are able to exercise the power of Jesus name that is important. What is important is that we are on our way to heaven. This is the thing that is important and underlies all our work. That our names are written in heaven.

Is this your understanding?

Are you sure of your place in heaven? As we get ready to continue the work of the harvest, let us ask ourselves, are you and I confident of our salvation?

If you are not sure, then make it a priority, talk to one of our clergy or myself, or someone else that you trust. If you are, then rejoice with me in this celebration of communion.

Let us take to heart what Paul wrote to the Galatians:

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few;

AMEN