

Farming is still the same simple process of planting, growing, and harvesting. The advances have largely been in the time it takes to do these simple processes. Today a large farm and its many fields can be harvested in a very short time period. Years ago much more time was involved. Imagine a football field, which has a size a little more than an acre. Now imagine you have to cut that grass with only a push lawnmower. It would seem like it would take forever. Now think of 100 football fields with the same push mower. Yikes!

The roughly six billion people of this planet don't think of themselves as a field. But these acres of people have been planted and are growing in this world. They blow this way and that depending on politics or popular feeling. They get watered with things that seem alright but in reality are poison. And they will face a harvest someday. We're part of those acres of humanity.

Jesus uses this farming picture of the gospel to help us understand what he was all about. He didn't come to this world to perform miracles and have people celebrate him. He didn't come to heal sick people or cast out demons. He did all those things, but they weren't his primary purpose. Jesus was here to show compassion on a world full of...

God's great spiritual harvest
A plentiful harvest
Too few workers

On Monday our church participated in the Bethany 4th of July parade and the Freedom festival at Eldon Lyon Park. If you walked or sat in the booth or if you were at either one then you know the large crowds. Starting near Southern Nazarene University the parade went all the way to Eldon Lyon Park on NW 36th Street. At some points the people stand three to four rows deep. I couldn't guess the number of people. Walking in that parade or sitting at that booth you can be struck with a realization, there's a lot of people.

Jesus was a traveler. He didn't stay too long in one location. He saw a lot of people. **"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness."** Jesus could've just kept to himself, spending time with his disciples, living the easy life. But Jesus looked all around him and saw these people wandering and dying. **"They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."** They needed spiritual guidance but got none. Instead they walked through the thorns of the law and got stung. They stood there bleeding to death because of their sins. But no spiritual comfort came. No one helped them. They were hurting and Jesus had compassion on them.

Barna Research group back in 2004 found the number of Americans who hadn't attended a worship service outside of Christmas and Easter in the last six months was estimated at 75 million people. Those are the unchurched and they live out there. Using that as a percentage of total population we could estimate here in Oklahoma City metro area that 300,000 people are unchurched. The figure is definitely higher. Jesus' words ring true, **"The harvest is plentiful..."** Plentiful means these people might just be open to hearing the gospel. They're hurting people. They're suffering, crying, and doubting life just like us. They're people we come into contact with each day. Ultimately they're bleeding to death over sins. So what can we do? We can start a conversation. Get to know them. Hear where they hurt. Then take them Jesus. Bring the gospel up close. Have compassion on them and shower them with God's love and grace.

Thirty plus people volunteered to walk in that parade in mid ninety degree heat. Eight people volunteered two hours to sitting in the booth in the 100+ degree heat. This kind of participation is awesome. But think about it this way. Fourteen people volunteered before the parade to hand out bags to children for the candy and postcards to the adults to invite to VBS. We were out on the streets for over an hour and when the parade float went by I still saw kids without bags. The numbers were so big that we couldn't possibly get to them all. We were just too few in number.

Jesus designated twelve men to serve as apostles. These sent out ones were named in the gospel this morning. Twelve men sent out with a plan. **"Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel."** Jesus gave them a severely limited plan. No Gentiles, only Jews were to hear the message. Does that mean Jesus wanted only Jews saved? No, but Jesus knew the ripe fields were also large. He didn't want the twelve to get overwhelmed. So he gave them a specific plan till more harvesters could be trained.

Today our task is not limited. **"Go and make disciples of all nations..."** That means everyone in the world is a candidate to hear the gospel. Are you getting overwhelmed yet? It's impossible some might say. We will certainly fail. We should take care of our own. Let the others come to us. They know where we are. Jesus did say, **"the workers are few."** The workers are vastly outnumbered and always will be. We should concentrate their working on those who are receptive and who need strengthening. The temptation is large to give up working in the harvest field.

Note that Jesus calls it the Lord's harvest. All the people out there who are unchurched, even the church members belong to God, whether they know it or not. So if the harvest belongs to God, and we know those in the harvest will never come in on their own we need to go to God for the plans and the message. We've got the plans, the whole world. Now we hear from Jesus the message, **"Preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near."** God's saving activity; the plan to save the world from its sins was in motion. Jesus was that plan. He was carrying out what would take away people's sins. He was calling them to repent and believe. He was laying down the gospel of God's grace. That's what harvesters like you and me need to share with those we seek. Christ has come and has already done the work. People are already right with God because of Jesus.

But we're still so small. How much impact could we possibly have on a city the size of Oklahoma City? **"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."** Pray for more workers. Pray for more boys and young men to consider being a pastor. Encourage your own children to consider teaching in a Lutheran school. Give to allow these schools in our own national church body an opportunity to continue to train the next generation of workers. And as you pray recognize that you just might become the answer to your own prayers. God will use you. You harvest when you share with the sad coworker who needs to know God is in control, the depressed family member who needs to hear that God still loves them in Christ, and the stranger at the store who needs help. You are a worker in God's harvest field.

The fields ready for harvest are large. They encompass the entire world. Thankfully God asks us to concentrate on our small portion of the field and look to find ways to impact the larger field. So we set our eyes on the harvest fields around us in our neighborhood and community. We keep aligned with our Savior who had compassion on all the people who were wandering in the desert of sin without any guidance. We ask for clarity of the Word to apply it to the people who are hurting. **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."** Let each one of us be encouraged to be prepared to go and be sent into the harvest fields of God's great spiritual harvest.