

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost Proper 9 C July 4, 2010

*“The harvest is plentiful,”* says the Lord Jesus.

What good news this is; a message of abundance and hope.

What welcome words to his first hearers, whose lives depended on the harvest.

A decent harvest was good news.

An abundant harvest was great news indeed.

Today we cannot but hear the good news of the harvest without thinking of

*For beautiful and spacious skies, for amber waves of grain.*

Some of you have driven it.

Today we picture the richness of this vast nation,

The great grain fields of the plains, the corn and soybeans of the Midwest,

The cotton and timber and cattle of our own region.

Our harvests are often great; we feed ourselves and much of the world.

As Paul said in Galatians, in this rich land we both carry our own load

And help to bear the burdens of the world.

It is so true and so often forgotten that the Lord provides in these abundant harvest.

I doubt it myself at times.

How will we pay for college? Will I get the sort of retirement I want?

I feel it on levels personal and institutional.

Will the church budget hold up in uncertain times?

Can we afford to this or that? Should we hoard what we do have?

I have found the harvest to be plentiful so often in my life.

Three times in my life I have been very, very anxious for a job.

Each time, on his schedule, the Lord provided.

I have been quite poor a couple of times; eventually the Lord provided.

I have been lonely and sad about it; the Lord has provided now a spouse and children and the dearest of friends.

The harvest is plentiful indeed, in a rich land of opportunity and community.

The harvest the Lord speaks about here is not primarily the good things I enjoy and just mentioned.

And certainly not things that are only to be found in this great nation.

No, he speaks of the harvest of the Kingdom of God.

The harvest names a new reality, first known in Jesus,

in which the sick are healed, the poor receive good news, and those taken captive go free.

In America, many of those things have happened in ways that make the American experiment attractive across the globe.

You will not be offended, if I say, however, that the Kingdom of God is an even greater promise and reality than the great harvest of our national life.

It is a global, even cosmic reality.

The cosmic healing that began in the death and resurrection of Jesus the final and great harvest toward which we hope.

So the Christian life is that particular way of being that anticipates God's harvest.

It is living now as though God were already all in all.

The rules for the road that Jesus names here are hints at it.

No bag, no staff, being content with what you have.

No accumulating but enjoying the basic good things that the Lord of the Harvest means for us all to enjoy.

And then do the work that I have given you to do.

*"The harvest is plentiful,"* says the Lord Jesus.

and yet *"the laborers are few."*

Very few of us are ready to live the Christian life in its apostolic fullness.

We take suitcases on our mission trips; we do not like to rely on others for our food.

We save for college and retirement.

Yet the Lord commanded them to pray for an increase of workers for the harvest.

And this is what our church and nation need. We need workers for the harvest.

Politically, are not we dying for a revival of citizenship?

We do not need once-a-year Independence Day patriots;

We do not need loud voices whose greatest service to the nation is singing "God Bless America" at a ball game with a maudlin feeling.

We need voters; people with public spirit; we must recover a sense of the common good.

We need more people like Rette Miller, who will serve in difficult and dangerous places.

We need faithful men and women to reinvigorate the decaying institutions of our democracy.

So too the church needs a new generation of men and women like the 70.

We have had just about all the Sunday-morning Christianity we can take.

It will be the death of us before long.

We need folks eager to share in Christ's healing and restoring work.

People ready to take up his cross and follow him.

We need folks who know, as so many of you do, that the life of following Jesus is every minute of every day.

A life of richness and fullness beyond compare with any other state of being.

So as the Lord himself enjoined us, let us pray God to raise up workers for the harvest.  
Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup> is great day for such a prayer.  
The new life of the Resurrection is yet before us, calling us forward.  
A new American century that might yet be better than the last.

Consider, friends, that perhaps even we are the laborers, even we are the answer to that prayer.