

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week in our Gospel lesson we heard Jesus say:

^{37b} "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;..." (Matt 9:37b)

In this comment from the first part of his Mission Discourse, Jesus is telling us that, we the church, are the few laborers assigned to an abundant harvest. In the sermon last week, I then asked the church what we understand the harvest to be and why are we harvesting? What is the task that is set before us the church?

Today from our Gospel lesson we hear the second part of the Mission Discourse that began in last week's Gospel lesson. And in this part of the discourse, we hear that the task that is set before us will be plentiful, but it's not going to a pleasant task nor an easy task. Simply put, as we hear three times, this task that is set before us as Christians is going to be fearful. It is a task that says the laborer will face opposition, betrayal, division, unrest, difficulties, struggles, and even death. But FEAR NOT says Jesus, for those who lose their lives for my sake will find it.

Perhaps this is why our church is in the state that she's in...we're just to afraid to face the challenge and we then choose to sit back quietly in the fruit of our faith, the part of our faith that we are most comfortable with...and the fruit of our faith is what we know and understand about our faith.

As Christians or as people of faith, we know and are comfortable with what we have been taught...that through our Baptism we are entrusted to God and become pleasing to God. So, we gather here in this like-minded assembly of believers and we bask safely and without fear in the gospel that is preached and the holy sacraments that are administered according to the gospel. And in this Holy Word proclaimed and through these Holy Sacraments administered according to the Gospel, we know that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through the very faith we have been sealed with through our Baptism. In this gathering today, we know as Christians we have faith in the promise that we shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body through that faith in Jesus Christ.¹

As Christians or as people of faith, we all know this part of our faith. And, yes, it is an essential part of our faith, no doubt. But there is another part of our faith...and this is what Jesus is teaching us today. Jesus is now showing us the "working" end of faith. Today in the second part of His Mission Discourse, Jesus is telling us to get our lazy faith up off the couch. Part of this discourse calls to mind a quintessential part of our faith...we are the laborers...the laborers who NOT only harvest but we are also the laborers who plant. We are the laborers who are sent out into the mission field to plant...to proclaim the Good News of mercy and salvation through our faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus himself, is challenging us to consider what faith looks like after we are dead. In other words, how does the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ stay alive when there is no one to proclaim it or to plant the seed that will eventually grow?

¹ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P.. *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000. This paragraph is made up of snippets of Articles IV, VII, VIII, IX of the Augsburg Confession, as well as the Large Catechism, Fourth Part Concerning Baptism.

In this gathering we all know about God's action toward us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ...our mission is not telling those who already know the Good News, our mission field that we labor in is NOT in here...the seeds have been planted in here and they are growing. Our mission is out there and the seeds of faith are planted by proclaiming the Gospel to those who have no understanding of that Good News and it is proclaimed NOT just with words or speech but its also proclaimed or planted in truth and action. However, I think it is also important to remember what makes the Good News the GOOD News...is understanding who we are and how that Good News works in each of us.

As Christians or as people of faith think about the great comfort of knowing that if we have been united with Christ in a death like his then we are also united in a resurrection like his.² In our comfort we may...just maybe...then feel compelled to tell others of the mercy and the life we share in Jesus Christ...this is the Good News we tell of and we tell it NOT to those who already know it...but we share it with acts of grace, acts of mercy, and understanding of those out there who do not understand that one does NOT have to be righteous to share in the mercy of Jesus Christ. We are by our faith in this promise of grace and life, disciples of the manifestation of that promise: Jesus Christ. How could we not want to share this Good News with others who don't know about it?

Here again is where I believe the wheels fall off our call to discipleship and where fear turns us away from the call set before us by Jesus Christ. It's not so much our fear of sharing the Gospel that hinders our call to discipleship; it's our perception of the grace itself. The true sense of the Gospel or the Good News is the promise of grace we are given and the salvation we share with Jesus. This promise made known to us in Jesus Christ is not something we ought to use to elevate ourselves or judge others with. Unfortunately, we do, because we think that for the most part we have achieved all the correct things needed to please God and in turn, win our salvation. Luther has said that the human heart is naturally legalistic and cannot tolerate the idea that grace is gratuitous. He goes on to say that the heart cannot bear the thought that sinners might NOT get what they deserve. Nor can the human heart bear the thought that sin cannot be overcome, and grace merited by our earnest striving.³ In other words, we believe we earned the promise of Jesus Christ and we tend to share this grace and mercy as if IT WERE OURS TO GIVE because we have done something to deserve it and we ONLY give it to those we feel are deserving of it...if I gave something up to get it, then others had better do the same. And in this we find ourselves once again serving, placating, and worshiping the false god of death...ourselves.

As Christians or as people of faith, we are sent into the world as disciples simply by our faith, we are NOT sent to proclaim what we think grace is or who is deserving of it, but we are sent to proclaim...to give witness to the new life given...and to share the grace, the forgiveness, and the mercy given to all through faith in Jesus Christ. We are NOT sent in self-glory and righteousness, but we are sent in faith as people who have died to sin. Bonhoeffer said it this way:

² Romans 6:5

³ Van Harn, Roger E.. The Lectionary Commentary Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts, The Second Readings: Acts and Epistles. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001. The commentary based on the appointed Epistle readings for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, by George Hunsinger. Page 51. The author refers to Martin Luther, however my use of the author's reference to Luther here is not a direct quote.

“No praise falls on the disciple, or on [their] espoused Christianity. Attention should not fall to [them], but only on the one who calls...”⁴

“So the call to discipleship is a commitment solely to the person of Jesus Christ, a breaking through of all legalisms by the grace of him who calls.”⁵

Bonhoeffer goes on to say that “Discipleship without Jesus Christ is choosing one’s own path.”⁶ And I would add, discipleship without Jesus is worshipping our false god of death, ourselves. A few weeks back we heard Jesus say this to us in our Gospel:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

God through Jesus Christ does not give to us as the world does, nor does God give as we understand God to give according to our world. Our world currently divides us and separates us by opinion rather than fact, separates us by our fear of difference, separates us by our lack of understanding of others, and scatters and divides us like lost sheep without a shepherd...because we focus our faith solely on ourselves. But through worship, through this gathered assembly that is right now in this moment, gathered across all divisions and boundaries, we hear the Word, the Gospel, the Good News that is Jesus Christ among us. And in the Lord’s presence, our faith is conformed and shaped by the promise of grace and life for all...for all like us who have died to sin...does it just stay in here then? Do we just keep it all for ourselves? No...we are sent as laborers who are sent in the promise of new life to share this Good News...to plant the seeds of this Good News.

The One, who conforms us, shapes us, saves us, shepherds us, and unites us all as the one body is Jesus Christ...who is the same one who sends us out in mission. Through our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we become the seed of the promise of mercy and life. Yes...we are the ones who die to sin, but if we have died with Christ, we have been given the faith to believe that we will also live with him.

St. John writes in his Gospel:

²³ Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour. (John 12:23-26)

This Mission Discourse from Jesus today reminds us that we do not just sit safely in the fruit of our faith...we are called to serve that faith as the laborers who plant the seed of faith by becoming that very seed that dies, rather the seed that lives so that others can live as well. Through the faith poured into our hearts in the waters of our Baptism we know that Christ, being

⁴ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Translated from the German Edition and edited by, Martin Kuse and Ilse Tödt. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Vol. 4, Discipleship*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001. Page 58, par 46.

⁵ Ibid. Page 59, par 47.

⁶ Ibid. page 59, par 48.

raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him and through our faith we hold fast to the holy and certain hope that death no longer has dominion of us as well. May we know through our faith and hope that we are dead to sin, but through that faith, we are all alive to God in Christ Jesus...how is it then that we keep this Good News to ourselves?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.