

November Devotional: The Harvest

Ladies' Fellowship

Prayer Preparation for Spring Prayer Retreat March 2 – 4, 2018

Matthew 9: 36-37 ³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. ³⁸ Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

It always feels a little scary to do a Bible study on a well-worn passage of scripture. It is the "I already know this!" attitude that makes it such a daunting task. Familiarity breeds contempt, yet often we miss what is right in front of our noses. I hope this isn't the first time you have encountered this passage because it is very rich, and one we need to spend some time soaking in. This is a passage that is for us... for His disciples...yes, I am talking to you! I want to invite you to ponder this passage with me...to give you my thoughts...let's see what happens if we spend some time with these words of Jesus.

Many of you know that my wife and I serve as missionaries in Hungary with World Gospel Mission. A plentiful harvest is something I would love to see. The best analogy to evangelism in Hungary I have ever heard is that evangelism in Hungary is like kicking water up hill. What a powerful and useful word picture! Hungarians for the most part are not interested in the gospel. During my devotions, imagine my shock when I read that the harvest was truly plentiful! We often go long periods of time between seeing any type of fruit from our ministry. Plentiful harvest? What is this all about? As I started to reflect, Jesus used one of my own analogies against me. I've said in the past that Hungary is no waving field of wheat waiting to be harvested. It is more of a raspberry bramble...loaded with berries, but each one must carefully, painstakingly be sought out...and oh, by the way...look out for the thorns. I realized at this point that it is very easy to mistake the word plentiful for easy!

Most reading this at some point will have had the joy of visiting a U-Pick farm. They give you a basket and send you out into a field that is full of fruit. In no time at all you are standing at the scales paying for your pounds, quarts, bushels and baskets of fruit and other produce. Am I a laborer at this point? I'm sure you have heard about "Pickers" migrant workers who follow the harvest and bring it into the store houses. It is hard work; it is dirty work, long hours...little pay. I think many go into the fields expecting a U-pick experience and are disheartened, even give up when they face the realities of what must be done to see the harvest brought in. We are to pray for and be laborers. "Labor" is the word we use to describe having a baby. I've heard more than one missionary speak of the process of bring a person to Jesus as being labor.

Jesus has a prayer request...pray and ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. One would think that if Jesus is asking us to pray for something...that...well...it's a big deal. For me this is a bit of a head scratcher. Why doesn't God just do it? Why do we need to ask Him to do it? Personal involvement...is the answer I came up with. The harvest cannot be gathered if God's people are not personally involved. Period. It continues to blow my mind that the God of all the universe, the God of all power would develop a plan for the salvation of the world in which you and I must play a role for it to succeed.

What was God thinking?!? I hear Dr. Kinlaw's words, "Salvation is not found in ourselves it is always found in another person." I always understood this to mean, first in the person of Jesus who provides the means of salvation, and secondly in the person who told me about Jesus...leading me to salvation.

The trinity of missionary presentations is the tried and true...Pray, Give, and Go. So well-known and so often used that we may miss the truth found in it. It's just not the ways we can participate in the harvest, but also a picture of how participation often happens. You get a burden to pray...soon you get a burden to give, before you know it you have a burden to go. Prayer is where it all starts. So, please pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

Careful! I am not saying that prayer only exists to lead people to give and giving is what it makes people want to go. Each piece is of extreme value and none should be honored or valued over another. I am simply saying that we pray about the things that are close to our heart and we give to the things we value and that we give our time and ourselves to the things that matter in our lives. A people who pray for the harvest will be a people who see that the harvest is brought in.

The Lord of the Harvest, this name for God is only found here and in Luke 10:2. There are several thoughts that come to mind when I hear this name for God. The best is...drum roll please... that God is in control of the harvest. News flash! Jesus is the Savior! You can't save anyone. You can't choose Jesus for anyone. All that you can do is be a faithful witness, and an example of what God can do with a very ordinary person who is willing to be all God's and to follow Him with all their heart.

Prayer: *Father, we pray that your harvest fields would be full of laborers! Father, call your children to join you in the harvest.*

Strengthen those who labor, protect them as they labor. Help us when we grow weary and become discouraged. Give us eyes to see the fields around us. Give us wisdom that we might know best how to harvest those souls you have brought near to us.

We thank you that you are the Lord of the Harvest. Teach us to be co-laborers with You. Let our lights so shine before men that they see our good works and give glory to You.

We ask all these things in the powerful name of Your son Jesus. Amen.