

## **“Plentiful Harvest, Plentiful Grace”**

### **Matthew 9:35-10:8**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In parts of the country that are covered with farmland, harvest time is not only the busiest time of the year, but also the most exciting for the farmers. They finally have the opportunity to reap what they have sown, and go out into their fields empty-handed, and come back with, prayerfully, a great yield from their crops. But in order for that yield to be realized, they need laborers to accomplish the harvesting (though not as much anymore with the advent of automatic GPS tractors and such). The point is that the crops cannot just harvest themselves. Have you ever heard of “self-harvesting” corn? If there’s a seed for it, I can promise you every farmer would line right up to get theirs! Farmers, though, don’t get that luxury, and so, at harvest time, they go out in search of laborers to go out into the fields and bring in their yield. That’s the reality of planting, growing, and ultimately harvesting a crop, and the same applies to the Gospel proclamation from seed to harvest.

In our text this morning, Jesus says to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” If there are no workers, then there is no harvest, and the crops spoil and get tilled up into the dirt. Likewise, if there are no workers out in the Lord’s field to bring in His people by the proclamation of the Holy Gospel, then there is no harvest, the crops spoil, and the people are lost. Indeed, at that time in Jesus’ ministry, the laborers were few. He had His twelve loyal disciples and He was preparing to send them out in pairs, despite their number being so small. But is the Lord’s answer to so few laborers despair and dejection? Of course not. He says, “Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” The answer does not lie in creativity and outside of the box thinking to make the call more appealing to young men, but in prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit. There is a plentiful harvest, and more laborers are indeed needed, but not to do the work that the Lord cannot. Laborers are needed for His plentiful harvest, as they deliver His plentiful grace which belongs to all believers through the one man, Jesus Christ, in whom faith finds its object.

The office of the Holy Ministry has become such an object of scrutiny and so full of empty promises in the world today that it’s no surprise there is a shortage of men who wish to enter the Lord’s service. The sinful flesh desires the things of the world in the service of the Lord, and those two things just don’t go together. But that’s what the whole world sees when they look at the pastoral office in most places. Megachurches and their sensationalist “worship leaders” who never even meet the people they are

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leading in false teaching, wallow in their riches and flaunt their status instead of being faithful to the One who bought them with His blood. It's a sad state of affairs to see a dearth of men who seek to be true to the Word and the Sacraments as Christ has called them through His Church to do. Even among those who claim to be Lutheran, they have abandoned the call of Christ, and thus have abandoned the truth of the Gospel.

These people who call themselves “pastors” don't have the most basic foundation that is required to be sent out into the harvest. The Lord didn't just send the Twelve out without knowing what they were proclaiming. They were not just charismatic men who Jesus thought had a great public speaking voice and had the ability to “wow” the countryside with their flair and pizzaz. He sent them out with a very purposeful message, “Proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” The Lord Jesus sent them out proclaiming the Messiah—proclaiming that Christ has come into the world to take away their sins. The command of the Lord to His Church has not changed in these almost 2,000 years. She has not become wiser than those ancient, unenlightened men who first went out to proclaim the Gospel at Christ's command. And yet, those who claim to be the heralds sent out by God proclaim a completely different message than Christ has given His Church to proclaim. Beware of false teachers and false doctrine which sin produces in those who bring false hope, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:4, “For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.”

You are called to be discerning in who you listen to for spiritual guidance, not follow anyone who claims the name of Jesus without the true content of who He is and what He has done. And your sinful nature is wily in its ways to try and convince you that there is nothing wrong with these wayward gospels, and these wayward teachers. “Not everything they teach is bad.” One heretical teaching allowed to pervade the truth of Christ's Gospel leads to another, and ultimately to the entire loss of it. Do not fall victim as the Galatians did when Paul admonishes them in 1:6, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different Gospel.” Those who commit themselves to those false doctrines are not ripe for harvest. They sit in the field spoiling and turning brown and undesirable. They are placing their hope in another, instead of the One who died to redeem them, instead of the crucified Christ who has given them everything despite what their sinful flesh deserves. Those who follow those false teachers and truly believe their teachings must be addressed as Paul addresses the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not

solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh.”

The disciples went out with the clear message of repentance and forgiveness, in order to bring those who are ripe for the Lord’s harvest out of the field of this lost and dying world. And those men were fulfilling the Lord’s will that all men would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). That comes through the power of the Gospel, proclaimed by faithful men as they go forth into the world and proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9). As Paul has pointed out, there is no new Gospel, there is no new message to be proclaimed throughout the world that was unlocked by our now “enlightened” minds. There is only Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 1:23), and the resurrection promise which assures you of your salvation. That is what the Apostles proclaimed, and that is what is proclaimed in this place. Same message. Same Gospel. Same promise of eternal life by His grace alone. You cannot reap yourself into the harvest like the imaginary “self-harvesting corn” I mentioned earlier. You must be reaped by the Lord through His chosen means.

That is the message brought to bear in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Repentance, forgiveness, life, and salvation. And those things are works of the Spirit who now dwells in you, a gift of the Lord brought to you in the waters of your baptism. Through repentance, the Old Adam is turned aside, made into nothing before Christ’s forgiveness as you remember those blessed waters which washed you clean and made you His own. Forgiveness is found wherever Christ has sent His called and ordained servants to administer His Holy Supper. You receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ as His peace is imparted to you and you are declared righteous for His sake alone. Eating this meal which brings the medicine of immortality to your soul is the greatest gift that the Lord has given His people. Because in, with, and under the bread and wine IS the body and blood of your Savior. He physically comes to you and gives you His forgiveness that is yours because of His grace and mercy, though you do not deserve anything but His wrath.

The Lord, Jesus Christ, has called upon His Church to pray for more laborers to be sent out into His harvest. His sheep must be called home, and for that, His saving Gospel must be proclaimed in its truth and purity. He has chosen to work through His called and ordained servants of the Word to bring the message of salvation out into the rotting fields of this world, and bring in His yield of good crops from within it. The hope of salvation lies in the words of Christ, the words of the Almighty Son of God, who loved you so much that He gave Himself up for your justification. As Paul says in our Epistle lesson,

“God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” There is nothing within us that deserves His love and mercy, and yet, He still gives it. We have been justified by the blood of Jesus, and because of His death and resurrection, “we have now received reconciliation.”

That message, which Paul so clearly lays out in Romans 5, must go forth into the world, and the Church, through the public office of the holy ministry is sent out into the harvest. She is called to purity in the Word, right administration of the Sacraments, and to call suitable men into the office of those means of grace. There is indeed a plentiful harvest to be had, one in which you have already been reaped as a baptized child of the Most High God. That plentiful harvest is constantly ongoing, which is why fidelity to the Gospel of Christ and Him crucified is so important. The Lord’s plentiful grace abounds for all. It is a free gift which the disciples proclaimed throughout the land to the lost sheep of Israel, and “by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ,” that free gift abounds for many. Salvation belongs to all who are in the faith of Him who died to reconcile the world to God, and because He has granted you reconciliation you have the promise of His plentiful grace. As one who has been harvested for the Lord’s own possession, you will dwell in the safety and peace of His Holy presence forever, dwelling among the angels and the entire communion of saints for all eternity. Amen.