

Preparing for Harvest Series III: Participating in the Harvest

John 4:35-36 Don't you have a saying, "It's still four months until harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together

Background

Jesus had just had an encounter with a woman of Samaria that caused her to go into town and persuade everyone that she had met the Messiah. As this encounter was happening, the disciples, having returned from getting food, stood back and held their tongue over what was, in the time, a “very inappropriate conversation”. Jesus didn’t seem to mind that he was breaking convention by, 1) talking with a Samaritan (“*how can you ask me for a drink?*”), and 2) talking openly with a woman. He didn’t mind because what He saw in the woman and in the situation was not what the disciples or anyone else saw. Jesus saw a harvest that was ready to be reaped – lives that were on the brink of change, and him being in the right place to make it happen.

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” – John 4:27

Do You See What I See?

When the woman left, the disciples re-engaged Jesus with the former concern they had – getting him some food. Interesting that even after she left, the disciples said nothing about the incident. They turned their attention to begging Jesus to eat...

The disciples saw the need Jesus had, but could not see the need in the Samaritan woman. For the disciples, the only opportunity was to meet what they were comfortable meeting: the nourishment needs of their friend.

Seeing the opportunity is often hard, not because we cannot see it, but because we don’t (or don’t know how) to put ourselves into the hard situations that expose the opportunity.

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So, when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?” – Acts 10:27-29

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group – Galatians 2:11-12

Peter was very open and bold when it came to preaching the gospel in Jewish circles. After Pentecost, there was virtually no situation that Peter would shy away from, even facing the high priests with the reality of Jesus. No situation, except being seen with a Gentile. Peter struggled with this on several occasions. Had Peter not had 3 very pointed visions and God's voice on those three occasions, he would not have even considered Cornelius' request.

The disciples were responding to their situation the same way, probably glad the woman was gone, and looking forward to getting on their journey back home – back where it was known, comfortable and in their case, segregated. Jesus, however, was about to show them that the harvest that He was calling them into was nothing like that.

The Harvest Is Not...

Known:

Anyone who has planted anything knows that harvests are never guaranteed.

He also said "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how." – Mark 4:26-27

With all of our technology and study, we can only **predict with some level of certainty** that the harvest will happen, but since we cannot control all conditions, and because we really don't know how it all happens, we have to trust in that which we cannot see or know for the reality of the harvest.

Comfortable:

Over and over Jesus called his followers to go into places that they were not familiar with, even going as far as saying they would be hated of all men. Jesus demonstrated the life of faith and the mindset of a harvester in the Kingdom of God when he washed the disciples' feet right before he was betrayed.

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? It is not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. – Luke 22:24-27

Exclusionary:

Jesus had the audacity to openly pour out God's love and healing on those that were considered outside of the privileged group. Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, sinners and saints, all were open to receive what God had.

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. – John 10:16

The harvest is inclusive of all, which is why it is so big. The disciples in going through Samaria only saw the region as a necessary evil – something to put up with or to bear in their quest for living the life they thought Jesus wanted to give them, all the while missing the very thing that Jesus wanted to show them.

The harvest is right in front of you, if you are willing to open your eyes to see it.

Open the Eyes of My Heart

Why couldn't the disciples see what Jesus saw? Why did it take Peter so many opportunities before he recognized God's opportunity? Why do we miss the opportunities to participate in the harvest of the Lord?

On another occasion, Jesus was met over and over again by people in need: the blind, the possessed, the mute. During that time, he was also met by judgmental Pharisees, more concerned with the methods Jesus used rather than the results.

*While they were going out, a man who was demon possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."... When he saw the crowds, **he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd** – Matthew 9:33-34,36*

We, like they, fail to see the opportunities for harvest because we look for them with the wrong set of eyes. Jesus' heart of compassion went out to the crowd when he saw what they were suffering with, what they needed, and what they weren't getting from those who should have been shepherds. Jesus' heart of compassion went out to the Samaritan woman who had to deal with her own reputation and disappointment.

Then he said to his disciples, "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest. – Matthew 9:37-38

When we approach those around us with true compassion, we will begin to see how vast the opportunities for harvest are.

The Domino Effect

Jesus responded to the opportunity, he called a harvest, in the life of the woman of Samaria. What did she do in return?

Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" – John 4:28-29

Because Jesus took the opportunity to act on the harvest in front of him, the woman's eyes were also opened, and she thought, not of herself, but of all of the people in her town. She didn't seem to be concerned with her reputation anymore. She was more concerned with the hearts and lives of the people.

When we respond in compassion to the harvest in front of us – when we can open our eyes and see what we would not normally look for, it affects the lives of those around us in a way that causes them to do the same. It is a forest fire, started by one spark, one person willing to look beyond himself to the potential in the lives of people around him. Mother Teresa said

"In this life, we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love."

Mother Teresa exemplified a life of seeing the harvest in those that others would pass by, and from a simple response of a heart of compassion, continues to touch the lives of people around the world.

Questions

- Where have you chosen comfort, exclusion or what is known over the potential to see something new, different, or valuable in the lives of those around you?
- Where do you need to display more true compassion? With whom?
- How does protecting your own reputation keep you from reaching out to those who society (social society, religious society, etc) says are the wrong people to associate with?
- Who benefits from the harvests you participate in? You? Others?

Preparation for Next Week

- Read Nehemiah chapters 1-3; Matthew 20:1-16
- Think about those that work in the harvest alongside you. Do both share in the work?