



1. Expect The Harvest

Luke 10:1-20

As many of you know, I walk our dog Judy every day and usually I like to have a bit of variety – along the beach one day and into the country another day. This is the time of year when the harvest begins. Just walk into the fields that are near to us in Walton and you'll see the grain fields already for harvest, the grain full in the ear and the crop losing its green ready for harvesting.

So therefore its quite an appropriate time of year to be talking about reaping. And it starts by Jesus sending out “another” 70/72. Another? Yes , He had already sent out the 12 disciples and now He was commissioning more. Being sent out in Scripture is never for the elite. It's for everyone and we've heard plenty of that recently as we have reviewed Jesus' later commands where He does commission all of His disciples. If you are a follower of Jesus this morning, a disciple – then this applies to you. We are people who are being sent out.

And Jesus sends them out two by two into places where Jesus is going to go to prepare people for Him. George Campbell Morgan suggested that if you look carefully at the geography of Luke, Jesus seems to be sending them into an area just beyond Jordan called Perea which was just beyond Jordan close to Judea. Many Jews lived there as did many Gentiles. The disciples were preparing people for an encounter with Jesus. They weren't there to sow seed or nurture the crop but to reap – to prepare people for an encounter with Jesus and bring in the harvest.

In the next few sermons we're going to explore just what it takes to reap the crop in God's harvest field. Today I'm going to preach on just two of the verse we read: *10:1 After this the Lord chose another seventy-two men and sent them out two by two, to go ahead of him to every town and place where he himself was about to go. 2 He said to them, "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest. 3 Go!*

➔ Harvesting is Urgent

Harvesting is an enormously busy time of the year. There is quite a tight margin the farmer has to bring in the crop. The crop needs to be ripe. The crop needs to be dry because if it isn't, it will rot when it's stored.

There is an urgency to harvest – the farmer needs to identify when it is ready and then get it in with a matter of urgency. I've said in previous weeks that it takes time for people to realise they need a Saviour. On average, a adult's journey to Christ in the modern world takes 4 years. And in our own community, there are those that are readier than others to embrace the gospel. But even knowing this we must understand the urgency of the task ahead of us. If anything is missing out of modern church life, it is the urgency of needing to brewing people to Christ:

This picture of harvest that Jesus uses suggests an urgency regarding evangelism that many Christians no longer feel. For a farmer, harvest time is the most urgent season of the year. Modern equivalents include the end of the tax year for accountants, the Christmas season for retailers, the exam season for students and teachers, deployment for soldiers and deadlines for journalists. Most of us can survive failure on an ordinary day, but failure in these “harvest seasons” is likely to be disastrous – starvation, bankruptcy or the end of a career. Today Christians have trouble believing that failure to accept Christ can have similarly disastrous consequences.

People are dying out there and we have a God who is producing the harvest but who is there to gather it in?

➔ Harvesting needs Workers

And the farmer needs to have workers on hand. In Jesus' day, workers were quite critical. Many people were needed to harvest the crop and thresh it. Usually it involved everyone in the village who took it in turns to harvest each farmer's crop. All that had to be arranged and it was quite complex getting all the right people to be in the right place at the right time. If anyone decided to be lazy, or fell out with the farmer, or who was selfish and only bothered about their own field, then the harvest just didn't get in and the crop spoiled on the field. Workers had different tasks. Some reaped, others thrashed, others gathered and baled straw, others made sure that there were supplies of food and water for the workers. Even as late as the Victorian period before more complex machinery was invented, harvesting could involve over 100 people to harvest grain on a modest size farm.

One of the highlights of our holiday in Portugal was what they called a Jeep Safari amongst the olive groves of the Algarve hills. Our guide told us of harvest time and how it was a task that involved all the people in the village and all their relatives who worked on the coast and even abroad. Why? Because the harvest was so great and the need so urgent that everyone in the community was needed.

These days in Britain, a combine harvester replaces the toil of scores of workers. It only needs two people to operate a combine: the driver of the combine and the driver of the tractor and trailer who comes alongside to take off the grain and drive it into the grain store. That said, most smaller farmers don't have a combine and usually hire one for harvest days. Less complicated all round.

The need for workers in traditional farming helps us to understand what Jesus is saying this passage. There's a large harvest Jesus says – pray that the owner will send out workers into His harvest field. To bring people to Christ is not a one man job – the Lord of the Harvest needs workers to go into the harvest field.

I got woken up a couple of times in the night in the last week by the Lord speaking to me about both this morning's and this evening's passages. The Lord showed me something in this passage, one I know well, that I've never really seen before. But it's entirely in my experience of seeing how He works. To sow a crop and to nurture it requires specialised skills which farmers have but to reap requires no skill at all – all it requires is a willingness to be used by God. The crop is there on the field – all that is needed is for people to go and get it. Anybody can do it because it's there to be got. There's no gift, no skill – nothing other than to see the harvest and to walk out and collect it.

Understand this. We don't produce Christians – the Holy Spirit does. All we have to do is to recognise the harvest and just bring it in. It is the spiritual action that probably requires least spiritual skill. You just look, see what the Holy Spirit is doing and collect – simple as that.

So you may say "if it's that simple, then why aren't we experiencing people coming to Christ?" That's a very good question. We do all the skilful things but ignore that which takes zero skill to achieve. All we need is the spiritual eyes to see the harvest and the willingness to collect it in.

Few are called to sow, but anyone can reap – it's easy. But realise how easy it is we need to recognise that we don't produce the harvest – the Holy Spirit does and we need the spiritual eyes to identify His work and the rest is easy.

I'm not being trite here – I'm serious. Let me go to my next point and I'll try to be clearer.

➔ The Harvest is Ready

Let me try to stop talking in riddles and be precise and practical from here in. You might be thinking to yourself this morning – what harvest? We sow lots of seeds in MRBC, but where is the harvest? Jesus uses these words about harvest tree times in scripture – once in Matthew, once here in Luke and also in John. The John passage is quite revealing: *John 4:34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.*

Look, and you'll see God's harvest! We spend a lot of time doing ministry in a church that we fail to see and prepare for what's under our noses. We look for a harvest in the community which needs ripening whilst we fail to see the potential in the ripe crop under our noses. What I've found

interesting initially as an outsider coming in is how little we realise how many people who don't know Christ or who have fallen away having once come here, still have a strong connection to the church and will respond positively to us when encouraged. Some of them are families and some "prodigals" - but all ready to be brought to Christ. So why don't we?

So what do we need to do to bring in this harvest? Over the next few weeks we'll explore this but the verses today give us the first step: *"There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest."* Pray. Recognise the harvest and recognise that you are not going to do all of it yourself. Pray that the Lord will send out workers. Pray.

This church is no exception to a tongue in cheek idea from the world called the Pareto rule. It says that 80% of the results can be attributed to 20% of the causes. In a company, you'll find that most of the sales are attributed to a minority of the sales force. In a church you'll find that most of the work is done by a few people. The same is true when we come to the harvest. There's no shortage of people who need to know Jesus in Felixstowe – about 92% of the population - but so few actually see the harvest in their midst – not enough to effectively bring it in.

How do we get more people interested in the harvest associated with this church? Shall I go down the desperate Pastor line? You know – coax and cajole, emotional blackmail and all that. Do the hard sell.

"Lack of interest in mission is not fundamentally caused by an absence of compassion or commitment, nor by lack of information or exhortation. And lack of interest in mission is not remedied by more shocking statistics, more gruesome stories or more emotionally manipulative commands to obedience. It is best remedied by intensifying people's passion for Christ, so that the passions of his heart become the passions that propel our hearts."

Tim Dearborn, "Beyond Duty" (World Vision, 1997) p4

And that's my desire as a Pastor, to pray and to encourage others of like mind to do the same so that all of us will have open eyes and have a passion for those whom the Holy Spirit is working in – to just do the easiest thing in the world – to bring in God's harvest – to bring into faith those people He is working in particularly those we already know God is working in – sons, daughters, grandchildren, husbands, wives, friends, neighbours who don't know Jesus.

Let's come before God and start to pray for the people that are needed for the harvest. This is our first step. I've invited the leaders, I've invited the church meeting and now that invitation comes to each one of us. Let's start to pray and discern God's will and way on this so we'll be effective. It's practical. It's scriptural and it's the first step. Let's pray for the workers and let's pray in the harvest.

But there's one more idea to give you apart from praying. Jesus first says pray that the Lord will send out workers and then He says "Go!" Go. Reaping isn't just praying for workers, but realising that each of us is one of them. Recognise the harvest, pray and then reap – reaping being the easiest bit – the one that has less struggle.

Personal testimony.

Do you want to reap? Good. It's the easiest thing to do as a Christian. Far easier than praying out loud in a Prayer Meeting. Far easier than putting out coffee on a Sunday morning. Far easier than stewarding the door. Far easier than doing a church clean up. As we pray, you have the pleasure of getting to know God more. We have the pleasure of letting the Holy Spirit open our eyes to see what He is doing. But most of all we have the pleasure of seeing people come to Christ and gathering them in. And it's as easy as that. Yes, really.

So what do we have to do. Pray.

Challenge.