

- We are continuing with our sermon series, the Harvest Effect, a series that is inviting all of us to really take a look at this Harvest and consider our role in it.
- Over the past few weeks, Pastor Kirstie has helped us explore what it means to make space for one another in our everyday lives.
- We are making it a spiritual practice to actively listen to one another's stories, backgrounds, and experiences.
- We are experiencing what it feels like to receive God's grace by recognizing that what we tend to focus on in this Harvest as being of high importance is not what God is prioritizing.
 - Remember when we repeated "It matters" - yes, that sermon.
- What we are learning is that the chasm is at work in this harvest
 - understanding that this harvest will continue to require humility, confession, and all the fruits of the spirit. - maybe some corn, soy beans, and wheat too while we're at it.
- I was talking with my grandpa this past week while visiting my grandma and I asked him how the harvest is going this year.
- Being from a farming family, this is a normal conversation to have
 - comparable to talking about the weather in small talk conversation.
- He explained to me that the harvest isn't going as well as it has been in years past.
- Normally, this is just a casual conversation, but for some reason, this conversation stuck with me and I couldn't shake it.
- Eventually, the holy spirit led me to realize that maybe this could be speaking to those of us who may not be feeling as though this is our best harvest season.
- Two of our biblical scholars this past wednesday discussed this idea that, "what you harvest out of me this year God, is different than what you'll harvest from me next year or even in years past"
- If any of this resonates with anyone, then first, I'd like to say that you are not alone.
- And secondly, I stopped by to say, do not be discouraged.
- For in the middle of our harvest season, I do not believe that it is a coincidence that God has brought us to this passage in Timothy to offer us a confidence boost.
- I mean, just listen to these words of affirmation Paul is expressing to Timothy:
 - My beloved child, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus!
 - I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day!
 - I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy!
- Another biblical scholar brought up the question, that I invite us to consider together is, what would it feel like to have someone say to you, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I AM SURE LIVES IN YOU."
- Our applying the sermon to life class noticed immediately that the author of this letter was addressing Timothy in a way that encouraged him, uplifted him, and loved on him while trying to offer motivation to continue the work of his Harvest.

- Another one of our scholars made the comment, “I wonder what it would be like if we developed a culture within our church community that could express this kind of affirmation.”
- Well, then immediately one of my questions for us today is, why can't we? What is actually stopping us from developing this culture that speaks words of affirmation?
- In my attempt to find a starting point, I joined our youth in the youth applying the sermon to life class and asked them to help me define what it means to speak words of affirmation.
- With the help of the dictionary and google, the working definition that we came to is words that communicate love, appreciation, and respect for another person.
- After coming to this conclusion, I asked our youth to share how often they hear words of affirmation.
- Their responses were,
 - “barely ever, no”
 - It's rare
 - Middle school is about popularity and people being jerks to everyone
 - It'd be nice to hear words of affirmation about my neurodivergence rather than denying it all together
 - I don't like getting words of affirmations unless there is constructive criticism with it.

pause

- Friends, if talking is one of our main sources of communication, and we're NOT speaking words of affirmation, then what are we saying? What is coming out of our mouths?
- I was honestly distraught, but not surprised at the responses of the youth when we discussed this question.
 - The words are usually mean
 - “Constructive criticism” that isn't really “constructive”
 - The church is very bad about giving words of affirmation

pause

- What would it look like, if our harvest could change that narrative?
- What would it look like, if our harvest could help us to not only give words of affirmation, but also receive words of affirmation.
- We NEED to receive words of affirmation with love and humility.
- Otherwise, how can we say God loves us and not qualify it?
- If God can love us without qualifying it, and we are created in the image of God, and living in our Imago Dei, then can't we do the same?
- I crowd sourced the question, Do you give out words of affirmation often? The responses I received were
 - Yes, if I know them. I'm scared to do it if I don't.
 - If I'm having a good day, then I'll do it, but only to my closest friends.
 - No, not unless they're struggling
 - Only to kind people
 - Depends on whether or not people deserve it.

- These are real responses that I received- I can't make this up - and it leads me to believe that this is the culture we live in.
- We live in a manipulative culture where giving a compliment or expressing words of affirmation is interpreted as buttering up or seeking something in return.
- We have learned not to trust that kind words are true.
- I'd like to suggest that love is not trust, friends, we can give love without trust.
 - Don't get me wrong, trust can be developed and takes the relationship with someone to a higher level
 - but extending love does not require trust.
- In doing some research, one of my commentaries that I love using, feasting on the word, suggested that 44% of all Americans have left the religious traditions in which they grew up and were nurtured by their families.
- The report led to this idea that in this land of religious freedom and mobility, leaving the religion of our childhood and seeking faith we can practice - a living faith community where we can call one another our sister, brother, sibling seems to be an advantage.
- As identifying Christians, when our words and actions do not communicate our love, appreciation, and respect towards someone, then they will leave, seeking a faith that does nurture and give sustenance. And it won't matter if this is where they were raised.
- Pastor Kirstie addressed this a few weeks ago that prejudices and hatreds are taught.
- Just as easily as it is to pass along prejudices and hatred, it is just as easy to pass along love and the practice of welcoming the stranger.
- Going back to the scripture, in the face of tearful memories and tough questions, the author gave thanks for the gift of Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.
- The author acknowledged the harvested faith from his family and gave confidence in Timothy's faith - an act of liberation.
 - An affirmation in his praise to God.
- In the midst of struggles that Timothy was experiencing at the time, there seemed to be no thought of anger or anxiety, but rather gratitude and love expressed in this letter.
- Timothy, at this time, was also experiencing discouragement in his harvest regarding the setbacks and obstacles to his faith.
 - Can anyone besides me resonate with Timothy right now?
- My research suggested that receiving gratitude from his mentor helped Timothy to see that he was part of something so much bigger than himself.
- Rather than being focused on self doubt and discouragement, Timothy was able to see the bigger picture of Christ's ministry.
- The author inspires Timothy to give thanks for the gift and was instructed to rekindle the gift.
- Timothy did not go through this journey alone, he had people ~his people~ to lift him up and help him to keep moving forward.
- To rekindle means to stir up the grace and faith and love that we have received, and we stir them up by putting them into practice and sharing that gift, given to us by God, with the world.
- There is a reason that 2 Timothy is considered to be a Pastoral Epistle
 - And it's because 2 Timothy has a congregational leadership focus.

- Guidelines and instructions to ENCOURAGE and MOTIVATE parents, spouses, and church leaders through a number of theological issues and questions of faith.
 - This pastoral epistle is for us.
- Friends, we have worked through some tough topics and lessons individually and collectively. We have had to face moments in our past that we are not proud of, or dare I even say moments that we are ashamed of. We have identified embedded prejudices that we didn't even know we had.
- We have done so much to get where we are.
- One of our youth scholars put this into perspective, so I will use her words, "I see the author as God writing the letter to God's people - this letter is for us and our faith."
- As we draw on our gospel passage, who doesn't want more faith? Are we not with the disciples begging that Jesus give them...or us more?
- We are not surprised, in fact, we are conditioned to receive criticism and assume that Jesus is scoffing in his reply,
 - "If you had even this much faith,"
- Assuming that Jesus is pinching his thumb and forefinger together
 - "You would be able to do anything you wished."
 - *Sorry, I was cheering too loud at the game last night so I don't have my deep voice today*
- If there is one thing we have heard before in life, it is the constant reminder of how short we fall.
- I reiterate, we have grown up in a culture that teaches us to expect a steady dose of condemnation.
- But, I want to try and put into practice the question I asked before and see if we can change the narrative.
- What if Jesus wasn't scoffing? What if he wasn't pinching his fingers together and speaking in a guilt-driving voice?
- "It is you who has faith and it is okay if it is only the size of a mustard seed"
- Just like the mustard seed, roots will extend and so will you. Your faith will increase for I am with you and I love you.
- Through these passages, we can see that God and Jesus are reminding us that grace and affirmation will help us to see and rekindle our gifts in this harvest.
- Verbal affirmation is a gift in the harvest given to us by God.
- Sharing words of affirmation over words of criticism and hatred is one of the ways in which we can and are able to share our prayers, presence, service, gifts, and witness
- As part of our Harvest, it's time for us to stop wondering what it would be like and start creating a culture of affirmation. Beginning right here in this very space.
- So, with that being said, I leave you with these affirmations.
 - You are people I enjoy being in community with
 - You truly make Sunday morning a time of worship rather than another day of work.
 - Being around you all makes me feel like I can really be a pastor
- That feels really good to say out loud. Thanks be to God. Amen.