

Sunday, September 11, 2022

First Lesson: 1 Timothy 1: 12-17

Gospel Lesson: Luke 15: 1-10

Sermon Series : Harvest Effect Week 2

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- We are continuing with our second week of the sermon series, “The Harvest Effect,” a sermon series that will invite us to see the harvest and consider our role in it. Therefore this week, we will continue on with the question that I raised at the conclusion of last week’s discussion, “Is the harvest worth it?”
- For as I reiterate one of the scriptures from last week’s conversation from Matthew 9: 37; *The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few?*”
- I also infused my own thought into this scripture, to suggest that there is good reason why the workers are few;
- For the spiritual harvest is hard.
- The spiritual harvest is not easy.

- Not to mention last week's lectionary also revealed to us, that what it takes for you and I to effectively work in this harvest, is that we must carry the burden of the same cross similar to what Christ carried?
- We are invited to carry metaphorically, 165 pounds of this harvest, that includes the broken, the lost, the marginalized and the oppressed;
- We are invited to witness, be made accountable to and act upon this idea, that in this harvest, **there are those** who are hungry and thirsty;
- **There are those** who are held captive,
- **There are those** whose sight needs to be recovered,
- **There are those** who need to be set free, released and delivered from the mental, emotional and spiritual bondage, that has caused them to question their value and sacredness in this harvest.

- Last week we also learned from our gospel, that we must also rise up to a level of sacrifice, that may even take us away from what we have learned from our own embedded upbringings and theologies of what is true and morally right, as it pertains to what it means to truly love God and love neighbor in this harvest.
- For along these same lines, I was reading an article from *The Princeton Summer Journal* entitled *America's History of Erasing History*;
- It stated, " In American schools, history is being left behind and erased. As schools increasingly pro-mote STEM (Science, technology, engineering, mathematics) disciplines and states lack in providing enough support for the pedagogy, many students are stifled from learning history. According to a study conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center in 2017, a mere 8 percent of high school seniors surveyed were able to pinpoint

slavery as the principal motive of the Civil War. Research from the SPLC further reveals that more than 90 percent of teachers are “comfortable” with teaching the history of slavery, and 40 percent of teachers believe that states do not provide sufficient support to this instruction. A whopping 58 percent of teachers find textbooks inadequate for teaching.

* Not only is our education system at fault in teaching the course, there is also a tendency to simplify and distort certain events and timelines of the past by “whitewashing” the material. In Texas, a 2015 state-adopted textbook referred to enslaved people as “immigrant workers.” It was not until 2018, when the Texas State Board of Education revised the curriculum to finally highlight that slavery was the primary cause of the Civil War. Even though Texas did the right thing by revising their curriculum in 2018, it’s a case of two steps forward, one step

back. In July, the Texas Senate passed a bill to remove requirements that schools teach specific writings from Martin Luther King, Jr., Susan B. Anthony, and Cesar Chavez.”

- And we know that some of these sanitizing efforts are only increasing within our educational system and beyond today; meanwhile pulpits across this country are engulfed in this deafening silence for fear of saying the wrong thing.
- Therefore, I stopped by to declare that this pulpit will give voice to the matter and summarize God’s Word in a few statements;
- That sanitizing **this harvest**;
- Silencing **this harvest**;
- Or simply pretending that the harvest never existed is not the answer.
- For another piece of history that may give some depth to this conversation that I researched from

an article online entitled “History Repeating,” on the Virginia Tech website;

- It states how an Irish statesman Edmund Burke is often misquoted as having said, “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it.” Spanish philosopher George Santayana is credited with the aphorism, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,” while British statesman Winston Churchill wrote, “Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”
- Either way I really resonate with the portion of the article that named that, “lessons from the past may not always ward off doom, but they can provide insights into the present and even the future.”
- Going back to our plant metaphor with the cuttings that are taken from the original plant, we must always be aware that these cuttings were taken from the original.

- For in this propagation process, we must never forget the original and furthermore be grateful for all that the original plant has taught us and will continue to teach us.
- Therefore the sacrifice that we must somehow embody, that I believe will help us to tend to, nurture and encourage this harvest to thrive, is at the heart of Matthew 20:28 where it says; *just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”
- This is where the Wesleyan model of grace really comes into play in my eyes, where as a people, we must be confessional in our work in this harvest;
- **To name that we** have not always seen the harvest;
- **To confess that we have** not always tended to this harvest in the way we have been called to do;
- To then by this confession, embody the essence of Micah 6:8; to do justice and to love kindness, and

to walk humbly with our God, going forward in our work together.

- Thereby knowing and trusting that through our humble confessions, that we are forgiven instantaneously by God;
- Realizing that the process of being able to forgive one another, will take some considerate time and efforts.
- For humanity did not get into this predicament overnight,
- Nor will we repair it overnight;
- However the good news I believe wholeheartedly, can be found in our first lesson, and Gospel today.
- For as I bring these lessons more directly into this conversation, you and I should note starting with the first lesson of 1 Timothy this morning, that there will be a testimony that comes from us being open to this harvesting work.

- For at the conclusion of last week's sermon, I declared that even in all of the labor that comes with this spiritual harvest,
- That in response to the question that I raised again today, "Is the harvest worth it?"
- My conclusion implied a resounding **yes, the harvest is worth it;**
- For when you and I allow ourselves to fully be in this harvest in every way;
- I stated last week that this is when **we become fully alive!**
- For in bringing in now two classes on Wednesday night, that get to weigh in and collaborate on this sermon and all sermons weekly; the *Adult Applying the sermon to life* and now the *Youth applying the sermon to life;*
- Both of these classes identified a strength coming from Paul in this passage.

- For the letter opens up in verse 12 with Paul saying; *I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence.*
- You see revisiting that article again that introduced the term “whitewashing,” that according to dictionary.com means *anything, as deceptive words or actions, used to cover up or gloss over faults, errors, or wrongdoings, or absolve a wrongdoer from blame;*
- I stopped by to name (along with both classes who I know would wholeheartedly agree with what I am about to proclaim just from our conversations together), that when Paul said that Christ “judged me faithful,” this means that our faith teaches us that with God, we do not have to whitewash anything!

- And so you see, if you don't get anything from this message, I pray we all get this....that from the very beginning, humanity has never been able to fully grasp this whole forgiveness concept;
- **Many of us** certainly have issues with forgiving one another,
- **Many of us** definitely have issues with forgiving ourselves,
- Making it that much more difficult for us to fully grasp that God forgives us unconditionally.
- For we see it in the story of even Adam and Eve, when they heard God walking in the garden and they saw they were naked, they immediately tried to hide themselves with fig leaves. (Genesis 3:7)
- However, Paul teaches us that half of the battle in becoming a great harvester, is to be able to be harvested;
- And part of how we allow ourselves to be harvested, is by embracing this idea that all that we

have done in our past; the good, the bad and the ugly, is part of the training process that will equip us for this work.

- For the superiority of the gospel to the law, is proved by its power to transform a **blasphemer, and a persecutor** into a saint.
- This is why we must resist the temptation to whitewash our sins, for it is the very remembrance of Paul's forgiven past, that not only evokes a thanksgiving that becomes like a balm of Gilead;
- You and I can become fully transformed by God's grace and power—which is the same grace God had transformed Paul from a tyrant into a zealous, self-sacrificing evangelist;
- So it is in this process, how you and I fully become the Imago Dei that has always been within us.
- You see, by the bestowal of divine power and gifts, Paul had been **enabled** or fitted for the work to which he was divinely called and commissioned.

- Thereby informing us all, that if God would do this for Paul, God can and will do it for you and I.
- For this is where my theological roots would open me up into a dance and shout of praise right about now;
- For the spiritual transformation that is available within all of us is infinite.
- For I suspect that when you and I from our childhoods were dreaming about what we want to become when we grow up;
- We are innately talking about something greater than any occupation can ultimately fulfill;
- For there is an inner working of God that is waiting to be awakened fully within each of us;
- It is the goal of the Church to name that this mustard seed is there within us all; leaving it to the Holy Spirit to continue to activate and cultivate the rest.

- You see Church, every small group, every missional opportunity, stewardship, prayer, worship service, sermon and more, is designed by the Holy Spirit, to plant seeds of life and remind each and every one of us that the seed is ultimately there.

- And so this is the testimony that Paul is documenting, with the hope of strengthening Timothy for his duty in opposing the false teachers; thereby preparing him for this work of the harvest;

- For Paul had not only been granted a humbling insight into his own wicked heart, but he had been granted a glorious insight into the sole supremacy of God.

- This seed had been activated I would imagine sometime in Acts 9 within Paul, where the Word tells us; Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any

who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

5 And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”

Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. [a]It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.”

6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Then the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. **9** And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.”

And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”

11 So the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. **12** And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.”

13 Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much [b]harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. **14** And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children[c] of Israel. **16** For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord [d]Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

18 Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

- It was then when Saul who is now known to be Paul, I would suspect became fully alive!
- **And how our gospel fits into this conversation if I could summarize it in a couple of sentences, you and I are witnessing how much God wants you and I to become fully alive.**
- And this is where our Youth Applying the Sermon to Life class will take the prime spot in this contribution;
- As a side note, I am beginning to see a little friendly competition beginning to form between these two classes!
- However, I was impressed by our youth's contribution to this gospel.
- For one of our young biblical scholars schooled the entire class by blurting out regarding verse 8 in her own words, “ Do you know how hard a woman had to work in those days to get 10 silver coins?!”

- She went on to proclaim how women were not seen as valued in those days.
- So of course she would rejoice if she found one of those coins that were lost!
- The youth also had a lot to say about the sheep as well as the adults.
- Starting with the adults, one pre-school teacher was concerned about the 99 sheep that remained behind, remarking how if she were to leave her classroom unattended, Lord knows what her classroom would look like afterwards.
- Another adult reminded the class how the 99 sheep most likely consisted of the very Pharisees and scribes that were grumbling about Jesus eating with the sinners in the first place.
- I received a text from one of our youth participants regarding the sheep before she went to school a couple of days after our lesson.

- She text me: “You know the story about the one lost sheep and they left the 99. Well I was listening to a song and I saw it from a new perspective— with people we are the sheep and God is the Shepherd. If one of us runs away or tries to hide from God, God will go find you and when he does find you, he will rejoice because he cares about every single person no matter the sin. Same with the ten coins. I had to share this with you because of what we talked about in applying the sermon to life and I thought maybe you would like to include it in your sermon I didn’t know.”
- My initial response to this text and just the energy that keeps coming from these classes as a whole is that the harvest is in good hands...the Church is in Good hands.
- For all of our aspiring biblical scholars from our very own community are echoing the main point

that I believe the Godhead wants us all to know and trust;

- For in my reiteration, I stopped by to proclaim that **God wants us to be fully alive!**
- So much so that God will not rest until God seeks out every last one of us to, ensure that we understand God's sentiment.
- For the good news is God wants us all to be included in this harvest.
- You see the opening statement of this chapter is very significant. In the Parable of the Last Supper, Christ had intimated that the Jewish leaders had rejected His call, and now the "street" people were being invited to enter the Kingdom.
- Apparently in this they joyfully responded, for we read: **Now all the tax collectors and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him.**
- It is not surprising to learn next that **the Pharisees and the scribes** were complaining and criticizing.

- Their objection was: **This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.**
- In a nutshell, they didn't want them there.
- Nevertheless Jesus is saying I want them here.
- Similarly, to our LGBTQ+ community, regardless of all that is going on in the larger church denomination, I stopped by to decree and declare that **Jesus wants you here.**
- To all races and nations, **Jesus wants you here.**
- Regardless of education and ability, **Jesus wants you here.**
- Whatever your gender, age and past transgressions**Jesus wants you here....**
Jesus wants all of us here.
- **Similarly**, this Church of the First United Methodist Church of Lincoln Nebraska, while I am tasked to lead this community, the consistent message will be we want you here. We will continue to commit to making the necessary space to doing everything in

our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness to express how much **we want you here too.....**for this harvest would not be the same without you!

- Let the Church say Amen!