

Fourth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): "The Harvest Is Plentiful, Laborers Are Few"
Galatians 6:1-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
July 6-7, 2019
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

My guess is that none of our staff or volunteers here at Holy Trinity, either up front, in the loft, or working way behind the scenes, would argue with our Lord Jesus when He says in today's Gospel,

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...."
(Luke 10:2)

The lone person who's weeding the garden out front or out back in the summer heat can only imagine how much quicker the job would be with a few helpers. The person ushering for the umpteenth time might imagine how much more enjoyable the experience would be if he or she sometimes got a chance simply to sit in the pew and worship. Our Director of Music Ministry and any of our devoted singers in Joyful Noise imagine how much fuller the sound would be with a few more voices. Our Family Promise coordinators could approach hosting week less stressfully if there were more volunteers to play with the children just one evening or sleep over just one night. Our Sunday School superintendent would more gladly anticipate the new program year beginning the Sunday after Labor Day if the bench were deep with teachers, especially for 3rd graders who'll be preparing to receive First Holy Communion in the spring.

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Though some days it seems there are **never enough** workers in this little corner of the Lord's vineyard, there are undeniably **many** loving laborers among us. Many of you seem to have taken to heart St. Paul's words in the epistle from Galatians:

So, then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

Many of the kindnesses performed aren't even **formally** under the umbrella of one of our committees or of our Stephen Ministry lay pastoral caregiving team. A few examples from my life in this community over the past 20+ years:

- On the day we moved into the parsonage in September 1996, the refrigerator was stocked with staples and there was a homemade chicken pot pie waiting in the fridge.
- One night soon thereafter the front doorbell rang as I was feeding dinner to Kristiane in her highchair. One of our church friends was standing there with a shopping bag filled with homemade Italian gravy and meatballs.
- Early on in my time here I went through the fertility process again, this time unsuccessfully. I was devastated and took a few days off. One of our Stephen Ministers visited me and cried with me and prayed with me when I couldn't even formulate my own prayer.
- Years later, I took Pastor Mark to Jersey Shore's ER and he ended up in ICU. One of our church families picked up Kristiane, brought her to the hospital, kept her for the night. I still picture them sitting there with her and with me when I visit others in that ICU.
- When each of my parents died, so many of you made the long trek up the Parkway to Florham Park for their funerals, and our Care Corps also went on the road to serve lunch in Holy Family Catholic Church.

If you haven't been around here for very long or you don't know others too well, you might think I got all that loving attention because I'm the pastor. Well, that didn't hurt 😊, but I can tell you I've seen others receive the same level of love. Those whose needs are known, who **make** their needs known, are often cared for by those who "*whenever [they] have an opportunity... work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.*" (If that hasn't been your experience, I am sorry for that, I apologize on behalf of our community, I ask for your forgiveness. Going forward, please be sure to let us know what you need from our faith family. We're far from perfect but we'll do our best to be there for you, by God's grace.)

There's a lovely connection between our Gospel from St. Luke and our epistle from Galatians in which St. Paul directs:

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
(Galatians 6:2)

Earlier in his letter to the Galatians Paul wrote:

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:14)

Working for the good of **all**, and especially for those of the family of faith, is how we love in a Christ-like way. Loving is **being** Good News as well as **telling** Good News. We've heard how ELCA World Hunger serves **anyone** who is hungry, not just Lutherans. We've heard how Lutheran Disaster Response provides housing for **anyone** who is displaced by flood or fire, not just Lutherans. We've heard how Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services reaches out to those of **all** faiths, including Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and not just Christians who are newly arrived in this land. Humanity, not Christianity, is the qualifier. This past week I learned how LIRS is finding foster families for the migrant children who have been separated from their families and who haven't been able to be reunited yet. *Bear one another's burdens... [W]ork for the good of all...*

"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow."
(Galatians 6:7)

"They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind," we read in Hosea 8:7. In Greek mythology we hear about "sowing dragon's teeth" with much the same result.

Both Galatians and our Gospel from St. Luke use the metaphor of reaping a harvest. They challenge us to sow God's good seed (holy, healing, loving deeds), and not sow Satan's seeds of distress, division, dissension, separation. Maybe you've heard this line from the poem "I Love You," by Roy Croft:

"I love you, because you are helping me to make of the lumber of my life, not a tavern, but a temple."

Keeping with this weekend's harvest metaphor, we can ask ourselves if we're investing our time, our energy, the God-given gift of life itself, in growing a garden or gathering garbage.

Maybe you've heard this refrain in a poem by C.T. Studd:

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

May the Lord help us overcome the twin dangers of:

- **self-doubt** that makes us dubious we have anything of value to offer, and
- **self-centeredness** that leaves no time, talent or treasure for anyone but ourselves.

Dear Holy Spirit, let us be on the lookout,

So [that], whenever we have an opportunity, [we will] work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith...

... of which we are blessed to be a part.

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham