

John 28 – Reaping and Sowing

09/08/2024

Scripture 1: (Jn. 4:27-42 ESV)

Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"

So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the town and were coming to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

Scripture 2: (Matt. 13:18-23 ESV)

"Hear then the parable of the sower:

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Sermon:

We have been seeing how both Jesus and the Evangelist considered this Samaritan woman to be important in her own right. We saw how she was important enough for Jesus to travel into the “unfriendly” territory of Samaria in order to meet her and deliver her into the Kingdom of God. Now we shall see more of why and how she was important to John; important enough for him to include her in his remembrance of Jesus' ministry and to memorialize her in his Gospel:

- her witness and testimony are a beautiful example of the Holy Spirit's redemptive, regenerating work in action; and,
- the hunger and faith of her fellow Samaritans who came to believe in Jesus demonstrates the generous (and merciful) inclusivity of God; how He takes those who are on the “outside”, invites and brings them “inside”, and then makes them part of the same single whole; and,
- how this woman was gathered as “*fruit for eternal life*”, and how her fellow Samaritans were also gathered as an exponential growth yield from her own “sowing” work, which makes her an inspiration for every generation of Christians afterwards.

Now to conclude her story: after Jesus offered her a spiritual spring of “*living water*”; after Jesus commended her for her honesty about her relationship status; and, after Jesus had explained to her that right, good, and proper worship was not predicated upon any single location but was actually dependent on worshiping the LORD “*in spirit and truth*”, worshiping Him with a right heart and by following the right forms of worship commanded by Scripture; “*Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?”*”.

Now, we noticed before that Jesus' conversation with this Samaritan woman broke several social conventions and norms, but now the text emphasizes how radical and controversial this really was. The ESV/KJV tells us that the disciples “...*marveled that he was talking with a woman...*” and the NIV says that they “...*were surprised...*”, but both English translations fail to convey the full emotional sense of the Greek {*thaumazo*}. Yes, they would have “marveled” and yes, they were surely “surprised” or better still “shocked”, because the emotional sense that John conveys is one of “wonder” and “astonishment”:

- like the feeling of a child seeing fireworks for the first time; or,
- the feeling of the scientists who observed the atomic bomb test at Trinity; or,
- the feeling you might get when seeing all the colors of the Aurora Borealis in a winter's night sky; or,
- how you felt when you first realized that Jesus Christ chose to save you without any regard for your own assumed value or for the depth of your sinfulness, but merely because He loves you and because redeeming you was an act of His own good pleasure, and an act of worship, love, and devotion to our God and Father who had given you to Him; for God's glory alone.

The disciples “*marveled*”; they were “astonished”; they were “*surprised*” because men, much less Jewish Rabbis, did not engage in public discourse and teaching with women, much less Samaritan women; it just was not done! Think about the wedding reception scene during the movie “Fiddler on the Roof”; remember how shocking it was for Perchik to cross the rope and ask Hodel to dance and how much of an uproar it caused. Like Jesus, Christians have never been meant to be overly concerned with keeping ourselves “socially acceptable” or to follow cultural norms and expectations when they are hindering God's work; we should be going to where the

sinners are instead of waiting for them to come to us because, “Why would they?”. We need to follow Jesus' example.

However, despite their shock at Jesus' actions, “...no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?””. They did not ask her what she was doing talking to Jesus, nor did they ask Jesus what was going on, nor why He was talking to her.

Why would they refuse to confront or question Him about something that caused them to wonder and marvel? He was their teacher: the man whom they had left family and home to follow and learn from; surely they would have expected this to be some kind of teachable moment, right? If their teacher was doing something outside of the norm and considered socially unacceptable; if Jesus was doing it, then there must have been a good reason for it, and so, it should have been a lesson for them, right? There was and there is, yet they did not ask for it.

Regarding why they did not confront or question Jesus about this, I can only think of two possibilities: either they were too shocked, surprised, and possibly appalled; or, they were “too respectful” of their teacher and they were waiting patiently for Him to explain Himself; but really, I do not know and cannot say. But, when you remember that all the disciples had just become “ritually unclean” (unable to approach the LORD for worship), because of buying food that was prepared, handled, and cooked by the “impure, apostate, Samaritan half-breeds” of Sychar and they were about to also make their Rabbi ritually unclean; then maybe, talking to a woman in public was not the “worst thing” that Jesus could have done, in their opinion?

Regardless, after His disciples returned, the woman left them alone, “*So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”* [The promised Prophet who is greater than Moses.] *They [the Samaritans of Sychar] went out of the town and were coming to him.*”. She left them, not because of the fear of embarrassment nor to avoid further questioning instead, she left them in response to what Jesus had told her and the work of the Holy Spirit within her; she left to go do the work of a Christian.

She responded to the presence of Jesus like it was the good news that it truly is. She left to go and bring other people to Him, just like Andrew and Philip had. She left to go tell everyone she knew, “*Come and see.*” (Jn. 1:46 ESV), inviting them to meet Jesus. Ultimately, it now no longer mattered “who” she was before, or what her life was like because she responded to Jesus as every Christian should; by evangelizing. She went out and shared the Good News that she had received and the best part was the fact that people listened to her, because she was a credible and believable witness.

So then, when the disciples returned to Jesus at the well, they brought Him lunch. “*Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?”*”. Maybe now they were also wondering if the woman had brought Him lunch? It makes one wonder if perhaps they were thinking that that is what she ought to have done, that Jesus deserved it or was entitled to be catered to by these Samaritans? Although John's Gospel is so different in tone and content from the three Synoptics, one element that is very consistent across all four is their honesty about the disciples and how they just did not “get it”; they often seem completely clueless, but that is because they lacked the clarity and perspective which we have post-Pentecost and because we have the New Testament.

Thinking about everything written in the four Gospels, all of the “Jesus conversations” that are recorded, I believe we should have a little more sympathy for the disciples because every time Jesus said something that they took literally, He meant it spiritually. Just consider this story: first, the Samaritan woman thought Jesus was offering to show her a new spring of living and fresh water, when He was talking about the “water of life” that

comes from God's Holy Spirit; and now here, the disciples thought Jesus was talking about lunch, when what He meant was the fulfillment and satisfaction that is found by pleasing the LORD, *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."* The ordinary people Jesus met were all more "earthly-minded", while He was always more concerned with the "bigger picture" of the "Kingdom of heaven" and each person's place in it.

Now, unlike the disciples at that moment, we understand that what Jesus means by "food" is to do the work of God, our Father in heaven. Jesus's "food" was to be successful in His mission, through the completion of His purpose in coming to Sychar: the redemption and restoration of souls, particularly the soul of this woman. Yet although Jesus was satisfied and sustained by pleasing His Father, He still needed to eat just like all the rest of us but, before He ate His lunch, Jesus explained to His disciples what was going on.

First, *"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'?"* He reminded them and us that there are certain cycles to life; that there are certain generic signs and markers by which we set out schedules and routines. We all make plans for the future based on these ordinary expectations because we are confident that things will happen as they ordinarily do.

Then, Jesus flips the script by saying, but *"Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest."* Instead of trusting to the ordinary routine, He tells us that we should be ready for the unexpected to happen because sometimes things do not happen according to our plans. More importantly, Jesus is telling us that sometimes what we expect to happen in the future, will happen sooner than we would otherwise expect; that sometimes it is happening right now. He tells us that we need to be ready now because the "Future is here!"

Remember in Matthew 16, when the Pharisees and Sadducees asked Jesus for a sign and *"He answered them, 'When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.'"* (Matt. 16:2-4 ESV). This was because they knew how to interpret the ordinary signs of life so that they could plan accordingly, yet they did not recognize the signs of God's spiritual reality. They were making plans and carrying on as if nothing unusual was going on, as if there was no reason to get excited, because they could not see that the Kingdom was appearing and had already appeared. They could not see that, *"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few..."* (Matt. 9:37 ESV). They failed to understand that the time for spiritual harvesting is now not later because, what happens after the harvest? The scraps, leftovers, and other debris remaining are all gathered together and cast into the fire.

So Jesus tells the disciples, *"Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."* Jesus told them that the season of God's harvest had already begun and that the LORD is looking for those who are willing and wanting to work the fields for Him. Jesus was already leading them by example, by coming into Samaria to "gather in" this woman and the other Samaritans who would soon be believing in Him.

- Jesus came to Sychar as both a reaper and a sower.
 - As a reaper, He came to gather these Samaritans back to Himself, seeking them out as the "lost sheep" of Israel and returning them to the true "fold" of the LORD.

- As a sower, He came to plant Gospel seeds in them that would blossom and bear fruit, as an early harvest, so that the hope of the Gospel would be ready to awake when the disciples, evangelists, and Apostles returned to Samaria after Pentecost (Acts 1:8, 8:1, 8:5, 8:14).

Jesus often spoke and taught by using allegory, metaphor, and symbolism and this is a beautiful example of it, especially because the symbols were multifaceted for different hearers and audiences; for the original disciples and now for those who have John's Gospel. There are four “symbols” here which warrant our close consideration: the sower, the reaper, the wages, and the fruit; who or what do each of these represent?

- The sower is God the Holy Spirit. He first cast the Gospel seed out onto the spiritual field of humanity. The seed was widely cast and distributed through the medium of God's word and through the lives of God's people: through the writings of Moses and the Prophets, and by Israel's division from the nations of the world (the “otherness” of circumcision and monotheism); by being consecrated and “...*holy, for I [the LORD] am holy.*” (Lev. 11:44 ESV).
- The reaper is God the Son, Jesus Christ. He proclaimed the grace and love of God; declaring His mercy and His judgment. He called people to repent of their sin and to rely on God alone, in faith. He called and invited people into His Kingdom. “*His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.*” (Matt. 3:12 ESV)
- The wages Christ received was the joy of and His joy in God; the glory of and His glory in God. He was satisfied and received His recompense (Isaiah 40:10) because His work was pleasing to the LORD.
- And, the fruit being harvested are the disciples: the Jews who followed Jesus during His ministry and every God-fearing Gentile who came to Christ; including this Samaritan woman and us, today.

Now for us today:

- The primary sower remains the Holy Spirit, but now we also get to join Him in the work. The “seed” sown is the Gospel and He sows it through us: through Christian evangelism and by our living a transformed life in Christ Jesus. Every Christian is called to be a sower of the Word and a sower of Faith. We are charged to scatter the Gospel seed far and wide but, as always, it is the Holy Spirit who will plant it, root it, and make it grow within the hearts of the regenerate elect; causing them to experience the new birth and become “born again”.
- The reapers and gatherers of the harvest are also every Christian. This is part of the work of discipleship; bringing us together for worship, for study, and for the loving service of others. We come together and we draw others into Christ's Kingdom with us; bringing them to the light of Christ for purification and for eternal life. Through preaching, evangelizing, witnessing, and by our intentional work of discipleship, we make “disciples who make disciples”. Through calling them and inviting others to “*Come and see...*” (Romans 10:14), we are “reaping” the harvest for Jesus' sake and glory.
- Our wages are the same as Christ received: the joy of and our joy in Christ Jesus, the glory of and our glory in Christ. We receive and enjoy the hope and expectant confidence that one day we will hear, “*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*” (Matt. 25:21 ESV). Our wages are knowing that we are doing the work of God and that, by doing so, we are pleasing our Father in heaven.

- Finally, we remember our middle school science and consider the question, “What is a fruit?”. Webster's defines “fruit” as being “the usually edible reproductive body of a seed plant”¹, while Britannica more descriptively expands the definition, as “the fleshy or dry ripened ovary of a flowering plant, enclosing the seed or seeds.”². That last bit is the key defining fact about fruit: all fruit contains seeds, carrying the potential of future generations within itself. Considering that one kernel of corn can grow up into a tall stalk and produce several ears of corn, each with a great many kernels of their own, means that each harvest produces enough fruit for the moment and for the future. So really, the fruit that Jesus is describing are “disciples who make disciples”, just as He commands us in the “Great Commission” (Matt 28:19-20). Jesus is looking for fruit like that found in His parable of the “Four Soils”, “*As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.*”; fruit which inevitably leads to the exponential production of more fruit.

The key point for us to take away from Jesus' teaching here is that:

- those of us who enter Christ's field to work the harvest, as we gather, we will never know who it was that sowed any one particular seed leading to the fruit we are bringing in; and,
- those of us who enter Christ's field to sow and harvest future generations of Christians, will never know if any particular seed will grow into a productive and faithful believer in Jesus Christ.

We do not know; we will not know; we can not know; and, we should not know, because otherwise we risk making the work about us and our effort; otherwise we risk claiming some of God's deserved glory for ourselves. Our only “claim to fame” is that, while “*Others have labored...[we]...have entered into their labor.*”. We are the fortunate elect of God: chosen by Him for His ineffable purposes, and invited to join Him in His great work of redemption by reaping and sowing. We have been brought into an unequal partnership with God, not that He needs our help for anything, but because He wants us to help Him, just like a child “helping” their parent with any given task.

- We get to reap what we did not sow. Therefore, we are obligated to sow for others to one day reap.

Keeping all this in mind should lead us and preserve us in humility, because we know and remember our place in the grand scheme of things, just as Paul explained to the Corinthians, “*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.*” (1 Cor. 3:6-8 ESV). Although no one of us are more important or valuable than another in the work, we each have our own particular role to play: some of us plant seeds, some of us water them, some of us reap a harvest; however, more often, we do all three only in different times and places as the Spirit leads and opportunity is presented.

So, our job, our role, our duty is:

- to sow the Gospel;
- to lead people to Christ;
- to introduce people to Jesus;

1 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fruit>

2 <https://www.britannica.com/science/fruit-plant-reproductive-body>

- to evangelize and share the Good News of salvation;
- to preach God's Word faithfully, in season and out of season.

But our job is not:

- to convert people to the faith;
- to convince people of the “rightness” of faith in Christ;
- to grow the membership of any particular church (to grow the number of people in church on Sunday morning for the sake of having more people), instead we should be more concerned with seeing an increase in the Kingdom and spiritual growth within the membership of each particular church.
 - Are we growing in devotion and prayer; in knowledge about God; building a stronger relationship with and trust in Jesus Christ; are we now living in a way more pleasing to the LORD, more holy?

Our job is to sow God's seed and to reap His harvest, while God makes that which is impossible for man, done. We share the Gospel, while He converts them to faith.

Then finally, *“Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.””*

- Over the next two days, Jesus taught the people; He loved the people and they came to believe in Him.
- Over the next two days, Jesus proved to the disciples that the harvest was already ready and He showed them how to reap and to sow.

However, this message is not confined to the 1st century; it is for us now as much as it was for them then. We do not get to waste time waiting for a special harvest because the time is now, because *“...the fields are white for harvest.”*

Jesus says that although we think that the time for harvest is coming, that it is still a long while off, the time to harvest is now, against our wildest expectation! Yes, we still need to do some sowing, but He reminds us that because someone else has sown the seed for this harvest. It is our job, our duty to go out and gather it in.

Just as Jesus had to leave the comfort of Judea and “had” to travel through Samaria, we cannot bring a harvest **in** unless we first go **out**. We must go out into our communities, our neighborhoods, our schools, and our social clubs. We need to go to where the “lost” are, not to where the “found ones” are. We need to go to the “Samaritans” and to the “Gentiles” because, while *“...salvation is from the Jews.”* (Jn. 4:22 ESV) Jesus freely offers it to everyone who calls upon His holy name. But, they need to hear the good news and they need to know His name before they can call upon it, before they may trust in Him, alone. They need to be told, everyone needs to be shown that Jesus *“...is indeed the Savior of the world.”* so that they may believe and come into His Kingdom.

The final questions for us: questions which should trouble, encourage, and convict each of us; are these:

- What are we: what are you; doing to reap and to sow for Christ?

- Are we: are you; waiting until some later time in the unknown future, or are we going into the field to bring in the Holy Spirit harvest, now?
- Do you knowingly, intentionally engage with people that you know are not Christian? Do you try to show them and teach them a different and better way to live, in response to your own salvation?
- Do you disciple your children? Do you still do it, even if they are now also getting older and grayer? What about your grandchildren and great-grandchildren?
- When was the last time you invited someone to “*Come and see...*”, inviting them to come and meet Jesus whether it be in our Sunday worship service, or to a Bible Study, or church group, or even just to talk, listen, and pray?
- Are you working to harvest souls for Christ?

We are surrounded by farms and farming communities here in Ohio. Have you ever met a “retired farmer”? I doubt it, because there is really no such thing. Farmers really only stop farming, once they cannot physically do it any more, and for many that only happens when they are laid to a final rest. The same is true for Christians. There are no “retired Christians”. Our work is not and will not be complete so long as breath remains in our lungs. Even the most physically feeble and frail of us can and should be active in living out our faith. While we draw breath, we may still pray. While our minds work, we may still pray. While our ears hear, we can listen with love and compassion. Sometimes it takes very little for us to be “as Jesus” for someone. It is never to late for us to sow and it is never to late for us to reap, for His glory.

We have joined others in God's labor and still others will join after we are gone, but while there is harvest remaining: until the last of the gleanings are gathered; we shall reap, and we shall sow, and we shall feed upon the same spiritual food as did Jesus. We shall be satisfied and filled in the knowledge that we are doing {the will of Him who [sends us] and [accomplishing] his work.}.

AMEN

This should remind us of another parable that Jesus told in Matthew 20, “*For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went.

Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'

And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.'

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'

But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' So the last will be first, and the first last.'” (Matt. 20:1-16 ESV)

We may not work as long or as hard as the saints who have gone before us, but our heavenly reward will still be the same as theirs.