

Bringing in the Sheaves

Ruth 1:1-22, Ruth 2:1-23, Ruth 3:1-18, Ruth 4:1-12, Ruth 4:13-22

You may know the famous song by Knowles Shaw, “Bringing in the Sheaves”. Who has heard that song?

Well, that song was written as a response to psalm 126 –the idea that we spend our lives working in God’s vineyard as God’s loyal and faithful servants, sowing the seeds of kindness, and many times, shedding tears of sorrow, pain, and empathy for a broken world.

Some of those tears may be our own for the things we’ve endured in our own lives. Some may be for others. But many times, life isn’t easy, especially when you’re devoted to God amid a world enmeshed in conflict. But we carry on, knowing that someday, the harvest will come, and we will be filled with the joy and love of God.

Or as the psalmist says in Psalm 30: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.” For Christians, we know the joy of Christ sacrifice and victory in our own lives, and in the lives of people around us. We know the joy of God in our hearts even in the midst of sorrow.

We may go out into the world in tears, but we come in from the field with joy! For God is Lord of the Harvest.

You know sometimes as people of the Church; we think we need to be responsible for the harvest. We spend a lot of time worrying about results and fretting when things don’t turn out like we hoped they would.

We plan events, and few come. We try ministries that sometimes don’t work. We touch lives, and we fret, because those people aren’t in our pews. And sometimes, we start to feel down, because we feel that our efforts don’t matter.

But we are not in charge of the Harvest crops. We are in charge of the sowing and the scattering of seed, and we are in charge of nurturing those seeds into fruition, keeping the covenant of God and bearing the fruit of the gospel to everyone we can. We seek to work God’s mission fields, and to harvest those of God’s faithful who respond to our good news. But we are not responsible for the turning of hearts and the growth of the crops. That’s God’s job.

We are not the owners of the field; we are the workers in the field.

And when we spread love, we never know how things might turn out. But spread we must. And sometimes, we gather people together, and we glean from the margins, and the edges, those who have been left behind, and we bring them to the God.

John Wesley wasn’t interested so much in just reaping the harvest he could easily see in the pews and churches of England. Wesley was interested in gleaning from the “leftovers” in the fields –those who weren’t welcome in the pews of the wealthy and well-brought up. He was interested in gathering from the margins among the downhearted, the poor, the disenchanted, and the depressed –those with addictions, and those with little money, those thrown into debtors’ prison, and those battling domestic issues, sickness, and pain. Wesley gleaned from the hopeless and showed them the hope and the abundant mercy of God.

And Christ calls us to do the same.

Today, we have heard the story of Ruth, a Moabite woman, born into another place and another faith, but whose heart found God. She followed her mother-in-law to Bethlehem, the land of fertile fields of barley and wheat – God’s House of Bread. Although destitute and hungry, Ruth found grace and hope in the fields of Boaz, where

she was allowed to glean and gather from the corners of the field, left deliberately for the poor. Like David who would come after her, she is a servant before she is blessed with abundance.

And through her humility and service, she is found to be worthy of becoming one of the “mothers” in the line of the Messiah Jesus.

Ruth’s entry into God’s covenant is fixed when she meets and unites with Boaz on the threshing floor. Symbolizing the very wheat she has gleaned, Ruth is laid upon the threshing floor (the symbol of God’s place of judgment) and found by God to be pure of heart and sound of soul. In the uniting with Boaz, she is married to God’s covenant, and she reaps God’s abundant blessings. Ruth is rewarded for her love and loyalty by becoming Boaz’s wife. As a member of God’s faithful in Israel, Ruth will go on to become the great grandmother of King David.

Jesus calls each and every one of us to be “gleaners” for God. In Matthew 9 Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the God of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.”

To whom will you pass on the stories of Christ? Who will one day say that YOU were their inspiration, their saving grace, the one they’ve looked to when they learned to follow Jesus?

You are the workers of God’s harvest. “The harvest is plentiful; the workers are few.”

You must answer the question, “Will you go into the fields for Christ?” And will your answer be “Lord, send me.”

But who will come after you? Who will sit here a hundred years from now to worship God and serve in God’s fields?

In a few days you will be asked to make a commitment to serve God and to sow seeds in God’s field through your commitment of your financial resources, your time and talents. As you ponder your commitment remember, “The harvest is plentiful; the workers are few.”

Shed your tears for the poor and disenchanted. Tell your stories to those who haven’t heard of Christ. Go out into your communities, into your fields, into your coffee shops and firehouses, your schools and businesses and tell the stories of Christ to those in the margins and on the edges of the world today.

Gather us in, Lord, gather us in.