

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost – 2022

Isaiah 66:10-14

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18

Luke 10:1-20

Given the fact that we live in a severely broken world, Christians are a pretty chipper bunch. A risen Savior will lift your spirits every time. Still, there's some really crazy stuff going on out there. I'm fairly certain that you've noticed. We were having a lively discussion in the Bible study a couple of Sundays ago about what is going on in the world and a clever fellow said: "It's like these folks are lost or something." Well, yes. That was his point. What exactly should we expect from those who reject the living God, from those who are curved in on themselves, from those who despise the truth and are at war with the church, at war with the Scriptures?

I like chipper Christians. Not empty-headed sorts, mind you, but those who see the world as it is and remain upbeat, optimistic, and confident; Christians who know that the grave is defeated, that heaven is our home, that life here is very much worth living – living well, living by faith, living to the glory of God. In a very real sense, not too much has changed since Jesus sent out the 72 to proclaim the kingdom of God. The harvest is still plentiful. I was at the Redlands Bowl on Friday. Man, it was packed. People of all sorts were there. It tipped a bit to the older side but there were youngsters too. During intermission, the guy in front of me, a muscular, hulk of a man in a tank top, tribal tattoo going down his left arm, asked his crew for a beer. They gave him a Bud Lite but, y'see, that was the problem because he was wearing a Coors hat. They then had a ten-minute conversation about how incongruent that was and where he could get his hands on a Coors to make the world sane again. The harvest is plentiful.

Two guys were arrested this week in Tulare (that's in the Central Valley). They had 150,000 fentanyl pills on them which is enough to kill millions of people. People are addicted to this stuff. Fentanyl completely destroys (rewires) your brain. After a person takes it a while it doesn't allow for anything else to be pleasurable except this drug. Authorities those felons a couple of days after their arrest. The harvest is plentiful. Some folks are losing their minds because the Supreme Court ruled that abortion is actually not found in the Constitution. Imagine. In the OT there was a false god, Molech, whose followers sacrificed their children to him. In the book of Leviticus, God spoke clearly: "You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 18:21). Abortion kills children. Some, however, believe it is the quintessential American right – to be able to abort children. The harvest is plentiful.

Sadly, I read in the L.A. Times about one of our LCMS pastors who had this reaction to the Dobbs v. Mississippi decision: "This ruling sets us back as a nation, a people, and a culture" he said. "Telling people that they no longer have the right to choose will not allow for proper family planning and will affect those who can least afford to have children." He continued: "It's a sad day as a Lutheran Church minister because it will cause a lot of chaos and calamity." He said of the ruling: "You're not allowing people to be who they want to be." Astounding. The harvest is plentiful.

Christians, you and I, corporately and individually, we are a chipper bunch because we know that the Lord of the harvest has claimed us. Each of us has been as lost as any other. There was nothing intrinsically wonderful about any of us. Love is the only thing that explains Jesus' cross. That was a horrific event. Suffering for sin was a monumental undertaking that only One could embrace. His love is an active thing. His love searches. His love sacrifices. His love brings eternal life. God's Son came to gather you like wheat into His barn. That's the parable of the wheat and the tares, the wheat and the weeds. This house of God is a barn where the wheat is gathered. Ultimately, we will find ourselves in heaven only because of God's love, God's cross, God's sacrifice, and God's Word. You are forgiven. You are redeemed, made new, and a recipient of God's Spirit. You are part of the harvest and you know it. That's why you're chipper. All of the world's unbelief can't change the fact that the harvest is plentiful and that sinners are being claimed daily. It's beautiful.

Every single one of you has a part to play in this harvest. Everyone is a laborer in the field. But it is also true that pastors are unique. We have three pastors who come here regularly. Hauschild, Payne, and Zimmerman (alphabetical order, Jim is used to it). Each of them will tell you that being a pastor is an exceedingly rewarding endeavor. The people; bringing God's living Word to bear on people who need life, who need hope and truth and light and joy and love. This Word is dynamic, evergreen, and it does not return empty. Gratitude; that's what I see. Sinners are full of gratitude for being brought into the divine harvest of Easter, the kingdom of our Father. Some people look at me and I know that what is in their eyes is meant for Jesus. Pastors are servants, well-equipped by studying God's Word to serve His holy people. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod needs pastors. Together, let's encourage our young lads to consider the ministry. "The harvest is plentiful, but laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2).

Through this Word, Christ engages humanity. He is the One who gathers into His barn. As He sent the 72 Jesus said something that is true wherever the Gospel is proclaimed: "He who hears you, hears me" (Luke 10:16). The Lord Christ is the preacher and He is the content of the preaching. His life is poured into the ears of those who hear the Word. Grace, blood, and the Holy Spirit are poured into the ears of wolves. That's what Jesus said: "I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3). The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world sends out His ambassadors to preach the Word, to preach death and resurrection. Wolves; not so nice. Mary had a little Lamb whose blood was shed for wolves. Preach the Word for the harvest is plentiful. Preach the law to wolves. My, what long, sharp teeth you wolves have. Wolves bite into family members with constant criticism; nagging wife, harping husband devouring one another.

Are you a sheep or a wolf? My, what a long tongue you wolves have. Wolves who are sheep speak out of both sides of their mouth because the tongue is difficult to control. That's what St. James wrote. The tongue "is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing" (James 3:8-10). My, what long, sharp claws you have. Do you shred the truth by deception, by half lies, by obfuscation and cover-up and hiding the truth?

Clearly, we need the Word preached to us. The Word keeps us connected to the Lord of the Harvest. In this Word is God's desire to convict us of our sin and direct us to the only place where we find relief – the Crucified Lord of Glory. He is with us. We are His harvest and He takes extraordinary delight in serving us. Far more than washing our feet, He washes us from our sin. He makes us like Him. Using His blood as the cleansing agent, He makes us holy. The Lamb gives us His body to eat and His blood to drink. That's what makes you a lamb, partaking of Christ. The milk of His Word brings you the glorious abundance of His grace. His Word brings you peace, like a river, upon the desert of your soul. The harvest is plentiful. We are chipper. We have His Word. Life is very much worth living.

My confidence is in God and what He is doing. You are here and that is evidence that the Lord of the Harvest is bringing good news to sinners. Your names are written in heaven. Rejoice this day. The Lord of the harvest has claimed you as His own. You are His and nothing is able to snatch you out of His hand (John 10:28). Wherever humanity is found, there the harvest is plentiful. May His kingdom grow. May His kingdom come.