

## **Season of Plenty: Harvesting**

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – September 22 2024

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Readings:** Deuteronomy 24:17-22; Galatians 6:1-10; Luke 10:1-9 NRSVue

**Reflection:** Psalm 126

**Greeting:** Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. (Psalm 126)

**Prayer:** God, our guide and our guardian, we seek you together in peace and gratitude. Help us this day as we join together to sing your praises and glorify your name. Help us to remember the generosity you have shown us as we remember that because of you the harvest is plentiful. We are thankful that you bless us by your grace that we may know your steadfast love and faithfulness are with us all the days of our lives. Watch over us, Heavenly Father, that we may know your gentle hand. Guide us by your Holy Spirit that we may know the direction you need us to go. And let us walk in the footsteps of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, that we may follow in truth and light. May we share in the plenty that we find when we put our trust in your word and your way. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 126

*<sup>1</sup> When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. <sup>2</sup> Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." <sup>3</sup> The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. <sup>4</sup> Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. <sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. <sup>6</sup> Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. (Psalm 126 NRSVue\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 126 and we hear of a change of fortunes with the Lord. That God changes our crying into rejoicing. That the Lord will provide for us from his plenty. How do you give thanks for the ways in which you have been blessed? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? Who can you share your blessings with? What are some ways that you can give thanks with others for the blessings we find in God's grace? How will you reflect the love of Christ in this season of plenty?

**Prayer:** O Lord, we thank you for listening to the voice of your people. No matter what we face we know that we never face it alone because you are with us. We thank you that your peace is ever before us. We come to you in the plenty of the harvest, knowing that you provide for us

with your steadfast love and faithfulness. We seek you out in our prayers this day, lifting up the causes that we have to rejoice. We turn to you with the difficulties that we face in our daily lives. We lift up all that we have spoken together, bringing all that we have before you. We also turn to you with the silent pleadings of our hearts, both the quiet praises that we lift up and the silent struggles we hold within. Though they go unspoken, we know that they never go unheard. We bring you our joys and our concerns, our happiness and our sorrow, our mourning and our gladness, knowing that you are there for us in all things. Help us to celebrate that you are with us with the plenty we find in your abounding love and care. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Updated Edition. Our first reading is from Deuteronomy chapter 24, verse 17 through 22.

*<sup>17</sup> “You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow’s garment in pledge. <sup>18</sup> Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. <sup>19</sup> “When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. <sup>20</sup> When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. <sup>21</sup> “When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. <sup>22</sup> Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this. (Deuteronomy 24:17-22 NRSVue\*)*

Our next reading is from Galatians chapter 6, verse 1 through 10.

*<sup>1</sup>My brothers and sisters, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. <sup>4</sup> All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor’s work, will become a cause for pride. <sup>5</sup> For all must carry their own loads. <sup>6</sup> Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. <sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. <sup>8</sup> If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh, but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. <sup>9</sup> So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> 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 6:1-10 NRSVue\*)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 10, verse 1 through 9.

*<sup>1</sup> After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go on*

*your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup> cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'* (Luke 10:1-9 NRSVue\*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This We begin a new series this week, Season of Plenty, and in it we will be looking at the ways that we follow Christ and the way that we share Christ with others. And we'll be looking at some different examples that we have of how we are to treat others and how we call others to share in Christ together. The first example that I wanted to explore is the idea of harvesting, because the harvest is used in different ways in the Bible to show how we are to be generous, how we are called to help others, and how we are to share in the plenty that we have. The scripture readings that I used for this week each gives us a different concept of the harvest, some of them literal, some of them symbolic, all of them relating to how we are generous because of Christ. One of the things that we hear about is the harvest that we have when we seek to help others. It is calling people to Christ because people in that sense are the harvest. That we are called to be the laborers to go out and collect the harvest.

In our reading from the gospel according to Luke we hear about Jesus sending out 72 disciples in pairs. They are called to go and share peace and kindness with others. That when people invite them in, they should go. They should stay with the people that invite them in and they should go about helping others. That they should not bring anything with them, but they should rely on the kindness of others. And they are to declare that kingdom of God has come near. We hear about how the harvest is plentiful because the world needs kindness. The world needs caring. The harvest is people who yearn for the kind of connection that we share in Christ. People who yearn for the kind of community that we have as a church. People who are looking for something more to life than just the daily grind. What I think we're hearing in Luke's gospel is that people are looking for something more out of life, and it is something we share with the good news of God's kingdom. The best way to reach people is to go and share the peace of Christ with them and help them with whatever they need. The disciples were sent to be a force for good in the communities they visited. They should share in their blessings and share the joy of following God. Because they aren't called to dwell on rejection but are called to keep going until they find those who accept the peace they share.

That sharing is something else that we hear about when we hear about the harvest. And we hear about it quite literally from Deuteronomy. We have this idea of sharing what we have with others. Because Deuteronomy gives us rules about how we are to harvest. Because it's a reflection of our love for the least and the last. That instead of going back and taking everything from the field and making sure not to leave a bit behind, it is in fact right and good to leave

something behind so that there is something for the poor, for the immigrant, for the orphan, and the widow. The vulnerable people in society are supposed to have a place they can go to be fed. And it is by leaving a bit behind to bless others because of the blessing God has already shown you. That when they harvest in the fields, if they leave something behind, they should leave it for those who are in need. When they harvest the olive trees, they shouldn't strip them bare. They should leave something behind for the people who will need it. When they gather grapes from the vineyard, they should leave something behind so that those who are in need can go work in the fields to feed themselves. The reminder in all of this is a reminder to the Israelites that they were slaves in the land of Egypt. It's a call to remember that they were once an oppressed people. That they know what it's like, and because they know what it's like, they should have mercy and be generous. That when they have the harvest, it is not just for them, but they share with others. And this fits in with this idea of the harvest that we heard about in the Gospels, that we are called to be a generous people and to care for others. In many ways, what Jesus is saying reflects this idea in Deuteronomy of being generous and leaving something for those who need it.

But I also mentioned that they can go to work for it, and that's something that we hear about in Galatians. Because in Galatians, we hear about how everyone should be doing their own work so they have something they can call their own, so they carry their own load. That it gives them something they can share. And part of that is it gives people a sense of worth, because they have purpose. That part of our generosity is not just giving to those in need but helping them to find purpose. And that the other part of our harvest is reaping what we sow. Now, we can also apply that to what we've already heard in our other readings. That when Jesus calls the disciples to go out, they're to go out and to offer peace to the people they're with and to help them. They are sowing seeds of kindness in the communities they visit, to reap kindness in the communities they visit. In Deuteronomy, when they're leaving things behind, it is sowing seeds of kindness to reap the benefits that society is better when all people are cared for. It is what we hear in Galatians, that you reap whatever you sow. If you sow for earthly gain, then you get nothing more than earthly gain. If you can only trust in yourself, you'll never have more than yourself to rely on. One way to think of this is when we talk about earthly things and godly things, earthly things are usually our selfish desire for material wealth, the things that give us status. When we want to be seen as better than everyone else, it's something that we collect and that we hold on to. And so, if we sow seeds of greed, greed will be our return. If we sow seeds of selfishness, selfishness will be our return. And if we sow seeds for earthly reward, the earthly reward is all that we will have. Now, on the other hand, if you sow seeds of the Spirit, seeking those godly things, then you reap eternal life. You reap blessings from God because you are not thinking about selfish earthly things, but you are thinking about the kingdom and doing the work of Christ.

And we get this affirmation that we should not grow weary in doing what is right because it is the right thing to do. We reap at the harvest when we are willing to keep trying. When there

is an opportunity to do good we should do it. That is what we hear throughout Scripture. When we live out the call to love our neighbor as ourselves we help each other. When we think about the golden rule, treating other people how we want to be treated, it's because of love. Love is how we reap the harvest that's out there. Because I think there's plenty of people yearning for connection, looking for a place to belong. People want to find ways to help others. They want to find ways to support each other but don't always know how. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. We have to be willing to do the work. People yearn for that community and that connection but the people making those connections are few and far between. And I think that's something that we are called to in Christ. That we are called to be a people who make a difference.

One could say we are sowing the seeds of salvation because it was planted in our hearts already. But we share it by helping others to experience God's grace. We sow seeds of peace so that others can be free from anxiety. We sow seeds of generosity so that others know there is a community in Christ that cares. We sow seeds of mercy because we know how much we need to be forgiven. When we do those things in the name of Christ they get to know Christ through us. When we build community in the name of Christ, people are drawn to that community when they see that it is a place where people thrive because they are loved and because they matter. Because that's the message that we get about the harvest. That people may not know what they are looking for Christ until they see Christ in others. But we have to be willing to go out and say, "here we are." We have to be willing to go gather the harvest. In the coming weeks I encourage you to think about ways you can invite others to share in Christ. It can be something as simple as sharing a meal, spending time together, discussing life, or hearing someone else's story. Because when we sow those seeds, they can grow into a strong and vibrant faith. But we have to be willing to answer the call. So let us go forth inviting others to share in the plenty that we find in Christ. May we grow as we sow the seeds of faith because the harvest is plentiful. Let us make it that the labors are plentiful too. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Our Current Series – Season of Plenty**

This series is a reflection on the work we are called to do as the body of Christ. In it, we explore how we invite others to the table and how we share in what we have. God's love as our shepherd acts as an example that we can follow. We are called to share in the harvest as we care for others and act with the Holy Spirit. In this season of plenty, how will you share the peace of Christ with others?

9/22: Harvesting  
10/13: Sharing

9/29: Shepherding  
10/20: Timing

10/6: Inviting

#### **Neoga Grace UMC**

752 Walnut  
PO Box 610  
Neoga, IL 62447  
(217)895-2809  
Worship 10:30am

#### **Toledo UMC**

Madison & Ohio St  
PO Box 267  
Toledo, IL 62468  
Worship 8:15am

#### **Etna UMC**

2799 Etna Rd  
Mattoon, IL 61938  
Worship 9:30am

Rev Camron D St.Michael  
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