



First United Church of Oak Park

You Reap What You Sow

Matthew 9

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In preparing for this sermon, I struggled with what to say, how to say it. When your heart is heavy and your emotions high, it can be hard to find the right words. It can be difficult to convey the message you think needs to be heard. I started by reading commentaries but found no inspiration; their words felt hollow in the midst of our current context. This scripture passage is known as “The mission of the 12 apostles”: where Jesus’s 12 disciples receive their call and are sent out as apostles with the authority and power to do as Jesus had done: proclaim, heal, cleanse, and cast out.

Why did Jesus do this? He looked around at the crowds and he saw that they were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Jesus saw that people were suffering at the hands of an unjust system, with no one to help them, protect them, or advocate for them. No one to lead them, leaving them to feel lost. They were sheep without a shepherd or perhaps even worse, living under the thumb of a false shepherd. Someone who would lead them astray, someone who did not have their best interests at heart.

So **why** did Jesus send out the disciples? Because Jesus was moved to compassion by the world’s pain. The word compassion means “to suffer with.” Jesus was moved by the world’s suffering, moved to suffer with them, moved to action.

I wonder how Jesus would be moved today.

If you look around, on social media, the news, we see more than people being harassed. For generations, hundreds of years, an entire people, black people, people of color, have suffered in an unjust system, first as slaves, then in new manifestations of slavery and oppression, treated as less than, fighting an uphill battle for equality that they were told they had a right to, but every possible hurdle and roadblock has been strategically placed to prevent that from happening. Our siblings of color are being killed without cause or consequence. Where is the compassion?

The harvest in our scripture is a metaphor for judgment. Due to our current context I read the harvest and judgment metaphor differently than many scholars.

I will say, I don't know much about farming or gardening, but there is a common saying about reaping and sowing, that goes beyond its literal meaning: "You reap what you sow."

You reap what you sow.

Our country has sown hatred, racism, and intolerance, in soil tilled by and stained with the blood, sweat, and tears of black and brown bodies since our beginning. What did we think such seeds would yield? And did we think the time to reap would never come? There have been seasons and opportunities to reap what we had sown, to clear and heal the land, but we didn't. Instead, we doubled down, expanded the field, and sowed some more evil disguised as tolerance, as progress.

You reap what you sow.

The immensity of our fields is now overwhelming. They are overgrown, deeply, stubbornly rooted, all-consuming; they are the system itself we call America, the very land we walk on each and every day. It no longer needs intentionally sown seeds of racism; it can survive and thrive on micro-aggressions and complacency. By simply being oblivious or ignorant, the field grows on its foundation of black and brown bodies, continually burying more in its expansion, silencing them, suffocating them, killing them.

Where is the compassion? Christ would have been moved to compassion by the pain of the world we are living in. How can we not be?

You reap what you sow.

We inherited these fields, and whether we like it or not, they are ours. We have to take ownership. We live among them, feed them, benefit from them. We have to take responsibility for them. It is up to us to harvest them, and they must be harvested, the fields cleared, and prescribed burns set in motion if we have any hope of healing the land, our relationships with one another, with our siblings of color; if we have any hope of moving forward.

Jesus called and sent out those disciples, not because he couldn't do it alone, but because it was their people, their brothers, sisters, siblings, who were suffering. It was their responsibility, too.

We too are called because we too have a responsibility to our siblings, to our siblings of color, because black lives matter.

You reap what you sow.

There are no special qualifications to be a disciple. Each of the 12 was ordinary, had no wealth, no academic background, or no social position. You have as much ability to be a disciple as I or anyone else. God sees you not just for who you are, but for who God is able to make you and what you are able to do through God. Right now, we are being called to be laborers in the field, to be reapers of our harvest.

To believe in and follow the way of God means it is our responsibility, to not just pray and proclaim, but to go out into the world and be conduits of God's love and peace.

This is not optional; this is the very reason the church exists. Prayer is where we start, but it's not enough. When we pray, we have to be ready to act on our prayers. For "prayer without action is dead." Prayers are marching orders. They help us align ourselves with the actions God wants us to take and we know the actions God wants us to take: proclaim, cast out, cleanse, heal...

In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "Some of you are asking, 'how long will it take?'...I come to say to you...however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long... How long? Not long, because you will reap what you sow. How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, and it bends toward justice."

You reap what you sow.

I say, it has been too long. The harvest is more than ripe; it is rotting, it must be reaped, it is a matter of life and death. Now is the time to act. Find your compassion, grab your reaping tools and say "here I am."

- Proclaim, proclaim the love and grace of God for ALL people.
- Cast out, cast out the evils of oppression, racism, and violence.
- Cleanse, cleanse the hatred, micro-aggressions, and ignorance.
- Heal, work to heal the land so that we can instead sow equality, equity, love, peace, and justice for ALL.

Know that you do not go out alone, we will reap together, with Jesus as our shepherd and his love and compassion to help us. Amen.