

“The Harvest Is Plentiful”

Isaiah 66:10-14

Psalm 66:1-9

Galatians 6:1-16

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Jesus says in Luke 10:2, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Why are many Christians reluctant to be laborers in the harvest? Perhaps we as followers of Jesus haven’t tapped into the most powerful form of sharing the good news of Jesus, which is invitation. Listen to this account of a survey done in England in 2007.

A recent survey done in England offers insights into the minds of those who do not attend church and ideas for reaching the seemingly unreachable. Most of those surveyed agreed that the strongest motivating factor for attending a worship service would be the personal invitation of a family member or friend. Other prime motivators: a more general church invitation (like a phone call or a flier), difficult personal circumstances, personal illness, or a time of depression. The survey found that openness to alternative worship structures and special midweek gatherings also catch the eye of the seeker. England's “Fresh Expressions” movement is proving quite effective in its experimentation with church traditions, attracting young and old alike, modern, or postmodern. Some churches in England have created a special “Back to Church” Sunday, inviting “lapsed” attenders to come back and reconsider commitment. Over 20 churches in the London area have adopted the event as a regular part of their calendar year. Though outreach efforts have sometimes seen mixed results—and though some surveyed say they will never attend any worship service whatsoever—a few of these ideas seem to be working. Worship at Christmastime has increased by a third since 2000. Easter celebrations have seen a 9 percent rise in the same period of time. Overall, worship attendance in London cathedrals has increased by 17 percent.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that invitation evangelism is more engaging than assertive evangelism. In fact, people you know or someone who might be inquisitive about your kindness are the most receptive to invitation evangelism. Remember this: God is already at work in people’s

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<sup>1</sup>Contributor is Jonathan Petre, “Church invites could boost congregations,” [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk) (5-4-07).

hearts. Your heart as well. It's not up to you to convince or persuade. Simply be authentic, real, and sincere.

In his letter to the Christians in Galatia, Paul was concerned about the Gnostics who taught a self-righteous brand of Christianity. Paul writes in Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived." The Gnostics promoted knowledge and self-edification. The Gospel calls us to a simple faith. What's a simple faith? A simple faith in Jesus Christ practices listening, not a proclamation of our version of truth. A fractured world needs to be put back together, not further fragmented. We must not be deceived by self-righteousness.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century there were many reasons for discouragement in Europe. There was the plague, an economy embedded in the feudal system, and Muslims pressing in from the East. In a small village north of Paris, St-Denis, there was an Abbot named Suger who had a vision for life that transcended the circumstances of his time. He wanted to rebuild the sanctuary of the Benedictine church of St-Denis. Abbot Suger envisioned flying buttresses, large windows, and vaulted ceilings rather than the more closed Romanesque style that existed. So, on July 14, 1140, what we now know as gothic architecture began. Abbot Suger's vision of God, one of welcome and openness, radically transformed that village in St-Denis. With the psalmist we declare in Psalm 30:4, "Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name."<sup>2</sup>

Christianity transcends boundaries. Christianity is motivated by compassion. Every human being deserves love, care, dignity, acceptance, security, and a full life. Yes...This

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<sup>2</sup>In the paragraphs of biblical interpretation above, I am grateful for the thinking and writing of Matthew Richard Schlimm, Carol J. Dempsey, OP, Donna Giver-Johnston, Linda McKinnish Bridges, John M. Buchanan, Stanley P. Saunders, and Hieraal E. Osorto in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 124-127, 127-128, 129-132, 133-135, 135-137, 138-140, and 140-142.

is a universal truth regardless of a person's gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or political party affiliation. A welcoming, bright, open, and architecturally pleasing worship space is important for a church committed to transcending boundaries, compassion, love, and acceptance.

Tomorrow, our country celebrates its 246th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Our forefathers and mothers had an identity and mission. Samuel P. Huntington, in his 2004 book *Who Are We?* makes the assertion that in post-September 11 America, our flag does not convey any meaning of America. Huntington writes, "The explicit visual message of the Stars and Stripes is simply that America is a country that originally had thirteen and currently has fifty states. Beyond that, Americans, and others, can read into the flag any meaning they want."<sup>3</sup> As a nation are we a "we?" May I suggest that the United States of America has an identity and mission according to the Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights, and the Constitution. We are a nation based on values common to all humanity and in principle embracing diversity and inclusion. This defines a country committed to the "we" not just the "me." We must work harder at re-creating "We the People..."

Christians have an identity and mission according to the Bible. We are loved by God to love God, love others, and make disciples. Halter and Smay, authors of *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, write, "If our gatherings can take on a fresh, soft, pliable partnership with the larger story that's being told through the scattered, incarnational life of our people..., our wineskins [structures] can easily be adjusted and people will be

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<sup>3</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 8-9.

drawn to both [our gatherings and the larger story].”<sup>4</sup> This way of being inviting connects others to local churches and the larger story of God’s mission of redemption for everyone. Let us learn from Isaiah 66:14, “You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the LORD is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.” This is a message of hope in one’s life experience which may feel overwhelming. This a message of hope for the collective “we.”

Do you see yourself as both a disciple and laborer? Why or why not? Proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed. Our actions have implications. Love God, love others, make disciples, and be laborers in God’s harvest. Exercise simple faith. Be known as people of love, who love, and do not make differences divisive. The harvest is plentiful. Be a laborer and invite others to experience God’s unconditional love. Unity in Jesus is an awesome invitation. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)  
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<sup>4</sup>Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 188.