

CONSIDER THE FIELDS

John 4:27-38

INTRODUCTION:

The wheat harvest in our part of Illinois began a couple of months ago. The corn harvest will likely begin in another month or two. If you grew up on a farm, you know this is a special time of the year.

In a rural community, there is no season as exciting as the harvest. It is pay day, Thanksgiving Day and T.G.I. Friday all rolled into one. Harvest is what the farmer looks for, works for, prays for. The harvest is what the farmer thinks about, schemes about, dreams about. For a farmer, it is ALL about the harvest.

For Jesus, it was ALL about the harvest. Hear these words from the fourth chapter of John.

4 The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John,² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.³ When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria.⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, **"Will you give me a drink?"**⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, **"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."**

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

¹³ Jesus answered, **"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, **"Go, call your husband and come back."**

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹ Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

²⁵ The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

³³ Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

³⁴ “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

For Jesus, it was ALL about the harvest. And, in the church, it should be ALL about the harvest. The church must always and ever keep her focus on the harvest with all her heart, soul mind and strength. The work of the Lord is difficult. We can toil long and hard and see few results from our labors. The temptation to quit can be strong. Only if we look toward the harvest, will we be willing to labor in the field.

In our text for this morning, Jesus told his disciples to look to the fields to find motivation for their labors. And I will tell you the same.

I. The Food That Must Nourish Us (4:32)

I want you first to consider the food that must nourish us.

Sometimes you will hear a sports analyst say that one team defeated another because they were more hungry for the victory than were their opponents. We know what is meant by that terminology. To be hungry for something means to be eager for it, to be ambitious for it or to be voracious for it. It means that the team wants the victory and nothing else will satisfy.

What do you feel like that about? What is it for which you hunger and nothing else will satisfy?

What do you feed upon to give your life meaning? Jesus fed on the joy of seeing sinners brought to forgiveness. As the Body of Christ on earth today, we should crave to see the same.

As you look at me, you can probably see that I am not well acquainted with hunger. I'm often munchy. I'm frequently peckish. I'm always up for a snack. But hungry? Hardly ever.

I fear that we are often munchy about the lost; peckish about evangelism. We know people who have not given their hearts to Jesus. We know neighbors, friends and family who are not saved. And we'd like to see them come to Christ. We'd be happy if they started to attend our church. We could get excited if they became members of our congregation. But it would be an overstatement to say we are **hungry** to see lost souls come to salvation. It would be an exaggeration to say that we have a voracious appetite to be bringing people to Jesus and that nothing else and nothing less will satisfy.

In our text, John takes pains to tell us that Jesus was tired from his journey from Judea through Samaria on his way to Galilee. Not only was he tired, we know he was thirsty for he asked the Samaritan woman to give him a drink. And we know he was hungry because his disciples had gone into town to purchase food for him to eat.

Tired, thirsty and hungry but rest, drink and food were forgotten in the euphoria of leading one more soul to salvation.

We will not be the church that Jesus Christ intends for us to be until we gain our strength and our energy from seeing the lost saved.

II. The Fields That Must Challenge Us (4:35)

The prospect of the harvest is what gets a farmer up early and keeps him going hard. He may love to operate farming equipment but that won't

keep him going all year long. He may enjoy being outdoors but that won't be enough to make him risk a small fortune on soybeans and seed corn, insecticides and herbicides, fertilizer and fuel. A farmer may really enjoy being his own boss but that won't keep him in farming. Farmers farm because of the harvest.

The church ought to be no different. The harvest must be what challenges us.

As we come to the fall of the year, the pulse of the church begins to quicken. You can see it in our calendar.

We have a fall youth kickoff planned for Sunday afternoon, August 24th – two weeks from today. We plan for this to be a blowout event! We'll get out the waterslide. We plan to have pony rides for the kids. There are going to be yard games. The Clay City Fire Department is planning to bring their equipment and have it on display for us. Steve Spitzner is planning to bring his squad car for the kids to see. Weather permitting and so long as there is no emergency that calls them away, Air Evac will be landing their helicopter on our property and letting the kids look around it. This is going to be a big deal. But the church is not about having a fall kickoff.

We'll have our annual hog roast later this year and it will be great. The guys will spend the day slow-roasting the pork loins. We'll have a fellowship meal in the New Life Center and everyone will have a wonderful time. But staging a hog roast is not the challenge before the church.

We will have a revival this fall. Ian Stamps from the Cornerstone Christian Church near Fairview Heights will be preaching. He is one terrific preacher. He's only a kid but he's a terrific preacher and you'll love hearing him. Nathan Jesse, music minister at Moweaqua, IL will be leading our music and he is a truly gifted guitarist, singer and leader of worship. I know he will bless you. But having a great preacher and a great musician and even having great attendances at our revival is not our goal.

We'll decorate our building for Christmas. We'll have our annual holiday dinner. The Lesters are going to be back for another concert of seasonal music. The kids will have their traditional musical. We'll do a Christmas Eve service. But none of this is what ought to bring out the best in the church.

Fields ripe and ready for the harvest are what must challenge the church. Any farmer knows that grain, not harvested when the time is right, may be lost forever. And churches need to know that we may never get a second

chance to reach the person we might have reached today. That's why we must make our parking as convenient as we can, our building as inviting as we can, our hospitality as welcoming as we can, our service as inspiring as we can and our teaching as clear as we can. We have no guarantee that any visitor who comes through our doors will ever come back again. We know we have one opportunity to make them feel at home. We don't know if we will have another. For all we know, every guest who honors us with his presence, is a white field ready for the harvest.

Here's the deal, people. The fields are ready for the harvest. Are we? We will be if it is the harvest that challenges us.

III. **The Fruit That Must Inspire Us (4:36)**

Jesus said, *"Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life."*

For the hardworking farmer, the fruit of his labor is the grain that he harvests. For the faithful disciple of Jesus, the fruit that we will harvest is eternal life.

The little epistle of James closes with these words: *"Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."*

For the disciple of Jesus who feeds on leading others to Christ and who is motivated by the fields that are ripe and ready for the harvest, there is great joy in knowing that his labor will be rewarded. After the harvest, there is eternal life.

But eternal life for whom? For the one who leads another to Jesus or for the one who is so led? And the answer is: for both.

The hymn-writer said, *"When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be."* I suspect much of the rejoicing will be in seeing those who are dear to us who are there, too knowing that we can enjoy the presence of God and the fellowship with one another for eternity. That is the fruit of our labor...that is the reward for our toil: eternal life for the one who sows, the one who reaps and for the one who was brought to salvation in the process.

CONCLUSION:

The great 19th Century preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon posed this question: *If you were offered \$1000 for every person you lead to Christ, would you be any more zealous to tell people about Jesus than when all that is offered is eternal life?* Great question! What could be more

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motivating than eternal life? That is what you have to offer and that is what you stand to receive. So let's all get busy telling others about Jesus.

INVITATION: #436 – *“Freely, Freely”*