

SOWING GRATITUDE, HARVESTING BLESSINGS:

The Law of the Harvest

Psalm 126; Galatians 6:7-10

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AUDIO: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/owing-gratitude-harvesting-blessings-the-law-of-the-harvest/>

The law of the harvest goes like this: We harvest the same as we sow. A farmer would never plant corn and expect wheat to crop up. We harvest more than we sow. Some of us sow our wild oats and then pray for a crop failure! And we harvest later than we sow. We harvest the same. We harvest more. And we harvest later. But the obvious point is that we do have to plant before we can expect a harvest. On the farm, we never looked at the purchase of seed corn as an expense. It was an investment. That's the way we've been thinking about our stewardship campaign this fall.

It's interesting that the context of this statement by Paul in Galatians 6 is about giving money (v. 6). One Bible scholar, J.B. Lightfoot, designated stinginess as the Galatians' besetting sin. It's simple if you stop and think about it. They did not think God's love was free, so they didn't practice grace. But remember that important sequence we discussed last week: It is all grace, so gratitude leads to giving, and giving leads to a harvest of blessings. Read Galatians 6:7-8 again. Do you hear it?

The opposite of stinginess is extravagance. One of my favorite writers captures this call for radical, extravagant generosity. Wendell Berry has a poem entitled, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front." Here's a part of it: "So, friends, every day do something/that won't compute. Love the Lord./Love the world. Work for nothing./Take all that you have and be poor./Love someone who does not deserve it./Ask the questions that have no answers./Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias./Say that your main crop is the forest/that you did not plant,/that you will not harvest./Put your faith in the two inches of humus/that will build under the trees/every thousand years."

But read this text carefully and you see it is about more than just giving money. It's about giving ourselves. And truthfully now, isn't the church about the only place left where we talk about eternity? Everything today seems to be about this moment, now. Jesus came from eternity, from God's heart, to show us there is more than here and now, more than what we can see. When we sow to the flesh, we harvest "corruption," or decay, loss, deterioration. Now note what Jesus said about the Cross. Read John 12:24, "...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." In Christ, we experience this faith exchange. He took on our corruption, death, and grants us his life. And that life bears much fruit. What a harvest! Someone said, "Anyone can count the number of seeds in an apple, but only God can count the number of apples in a seed."

Remember that we not only harvest the same as we sow and more than we sow. But we also harvest later than we sow. It's that later that throws us off. We are always tempted to give up

during the dormant season, the waiting season. Isn't this what we are trying to do with our Imagine If process? To dream and imagine what God's work will look like at harvest time. Read Galatians 6:9-10. Those verses talk about the "later," as do the verses in our other text, Psalm 126:5-6.

To really catch the flavor of Psalm 126, you must have a crash course, Ag 101. We didn't always harvest our crops with huge combines eating up the grain like some mechanical locust. For centuries, farmers cut the stalks of ripe grain by hand, bundled them into sheaves. We used to sing this hymn all the time in church--"Bringing In The Sheaves." As children, we thought we were saying, "bringing in the cheese," or "bringing in the sheets." Now we don't know how things will turn out in the immediate future, but we know that the God of the harvest is going to have the final say! We know how this story ends. "Going forth with weeping, sowing for the Master, Tho' the loss sustained our spirit often grieves; When our weeping's over, He will bid us welcome, We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves."

I can almost imagine the Apostle Paul, as he is writing this Galatian letter, with his Bible open to Psalm 126. As he writes, "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up."