



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for February 6, 2020
“Fruitfulness: Go!”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: John 4:31-38

Offering Living Water

John 4 is most famous for Christ’s encounter with the woman at the well. Jesus gives us plenty of cues for reaching out to those around us with the good news of his Kingdom. Those include:

- Meeting people where they are.
- Not being shy about striking up a conversation.
- Considering the other person’s needs.
- Keeping on topic.
- Moving toward a decision.

As Jesus meets with the woman at the well, he refers to the *“living water”* he has to offer. Upon accepting that *“water”* the woman was never the same again.

When it came to reaching out, Jesus never missed an opportunity. He teaches us by example that there are men and women all around us, thirsty for *“living water.”* What is needed are those who will offer it to them.

Christ’s Food

On the heels of Christ’s encounter with the woman at the well, Jesus has an encounter with his disciples. The focus shifts from water to food. How interesting.

The disciples figured that Jesus had to be hungry from the journey he and his disciples were making from Judea to Galilee. Truth be told, the disciples were the ones who were hungry.

“Rabbi, eat something,” they said.

Whereupon Jesus talks about the fact that his food was *“doing the will him who sent him.”* Doing God’s will was sustenance for Christ.

Jesus went on then to talk about the sort of harvest that comes from doing God’s will, particularly when it comes to reaching out with the good news of the Kingdom. Let’s read about that as we turn to John 4:27-38. Hear this then from God’s Word.

John 4:27-38

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?”

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

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

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

Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows, and another reaps' is true. 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."

Seizing the Opportunity

Winter is a great time to talk about the rhythm of sowing and reaping. Wintertime offers good perspective. We know that Spring is not too far off and the rhythm of planting, growing, and harvesting will soon start again. In thinking about such things, we are reminded that sowing comes first and then reaping.

It is clear from scripture that Jesus expected his disciples not only to sow the seeds of the Kingdom, but to harvest the results of that. If anything, the scripture we have been studying the past month from Matthew 13 bears that out.

Paul writes about such things in I Corinthians 3:6-8. *"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So, neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but only God made it grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor."* (I Corinthians 3:6-8)

When it comes to the harvest of God's Kingdom the time for both sowing and reaping is upon us. In our passage for today, Jesus speaks to the harvest. *"Open your eyes,"* he says, *"and look at the fields! They are ripe for the harvest."* (John 4:35)

And the question comes to each of us, what are the opportunities for outreach around you? And even more importantly, are you seizing those opportunities and trying to meet them?

We have been talking in our Wednesday Night Men's Bible Study about the importance of presence and proximity. There is no substitute for being present in a person's life.

Urgency

When it comes to the harvest Billy Graham writes this. *"The evangelistic harvest is always urgent. The destiny of men, and of nations, is always being decided. Every generation is strategic. We are not responsible for the past generation, and we cannot bear the full responsibility for the next one; but we do have our generation. God will hold us responsible as to how well we fulfill our responsibilities to this age and take advantage of our opportunities."*

Let it not be said of us that we let the fruit of God's harvest spoil in the field. What is needed are laborers to head out into the field and bring in the harvest.

Evangelism—Have We Just Stopped Doing It?

In a lot of ways, I feel like this generation has lost a sense of urgency which it comes to such things. I feel like we have traded a lot of things that just a generation ago were very much a fabric of our faith.

- Revivals were the thing just a few years ago.
- There were music festivals and camps that sought to win kids to Christ.
- There were plenty of training seminars that sought to prepare God's faithful to reach out.

We just sort of stopped talking about evangelism and soon after stopped doing it.

Not Ashamed

Consider these two songs, one much older than the other.

First, hear these words from the old-time hymn, *Bringing in the Sheaves*. It is more than a song sung at Thanksgiving. It has to do with the harvest Jesus talks about in winning people to God's Kingdom.

"Sowing in the sunshine, sowing in the shadows, fearing neither clouds nor winter's chilling breeze; by and by the harvest, and the labor ended, we shall come rejoicing bringing in the sheaves."

Hear this from a song that's a bit newer. It's by the Newsboys, a group we had at New Song all the time. Their song is *Not Ashamed*.

"What are we sneaking around for? Who are we trying to please? Shrugging off sin, apologizing like we're spreading some kind of disease. I say, 'No way. No way.' I'm not ashamed to let you know I want the light in me to show. I'm not ashamed to speak the name of Jesus Christ."

The Apostle puts it this way in II Timothy 1:7-8. *"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord."* (II Timothy 1:7-8)

Why People Hesitate

There are all sorts of reasons why people are hesitant to share their faith, and it all boils down to fear. People fear:

- They might do more harm than good.
- They won't know what to say.
- They won't be able to give snappy answers to tricky questions.
- They may come across as bigoted.
- They may invade someone's privacy.
- They might even be branded as a hypocrite.

Let's be honest; fear and timidity hold us back when it comes to sharing the gospel. We are uncertain how we will be received. No one likes to be rejected, ridiculed, or regarded as different.

Be Encouraged

Let me encourage you about your *“spiritual self-esteem.”*

God has claimed you as his child. He has saved you and guides you all along the way. He will not leave you to yourself when speaking to another person about Jesus. In fact, he honors that encounter with his presence. Rest assured his power will be at work.

We have no reason to be of low self-esteem when it comes to presenting the good news about Jesus. After all, *“God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”*

What Does Go Look Like These Days?

So, what then does *“go”* look like these days? It doesn't have to translate into going halfway across the world, although it might mean just that for you. It very well could mean going to:

- A family member.
- A neighbor just across the street.
- A co-worker on the other side of the office
- Or a classmate sitting in a desk right next to you.

Going will most certainly mean moving from where you are to where God wants you to be. It will also mean moving outside your comfort zone to the place where you can do no other than trust in God, which as we have said often is the very place God wants you to be.

One Beggar Telling Another Beggar

D. T. Niles, the great Methodist pastor and evangelist from Ceylon says, *“Sharing the good news about Jesus is simply a matter of one hungry beggar telling another hungry beggar where to find bread.”*

That's pretty much it. God does the rest. After all, *“the fields are white for the harvest. All that is needed are laborers to bring the harvest in.”*

Good Food for the Road Ahead

As we prepare to come to the Lord's Table today, know that what is offered is good food for the road ahead. God wants to fill you to the overflowing to the end that you are well-prepared to go forth in his name to share the good news about his Kingdom.

God is faithful about such things. He would not call us to go if he wasn't going to sustain us.