



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for September 13, 2020**  
**“inside OUT: Do As Jesus Did”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Matthew 9:35-38**

## **An Abundant Harvest**

Some of you who have been around here for a long time remember that the field behind the church was once a sweet corn field. Years ago we planted sweet corn out back to sell for missions. Let me tell you the corn grew great, and so did the weeds. The sweet corn also tasted great. You could have asked any one of the thousands of Japanese beetles who swarmed around the corn for confirmation.

Carl Greer was the fellow who headed up the sweet corn project. He had the land tilled, planted the corn, and then let me know when it was ready to harvest. It was up to me to find volunteers to get out into the field and bring in the harvest.

I called on just about everyone in the church. If you were over three feet tall you were in the field. I will never forget our son, John, who was about four at the time, dragging his garbage bag into the field to pick corn. I remember him yelling out, “*Daddy, where are you? I can’t get out of here.*” I eventually found him with his bag of corn in tow.

## **Harvest Time**

I drive by it every morning coming into church. This is the Nay Longview Farm on Highway 42. It’s where our own Miriam Tinnell and Joanne Green live. Their family has been farming this land for years.

I have been particularly struck this year by how good the crop looks. It seems that conditions have been just right for a bumper crop. There has been plenty of sunshine with just enough rain. It won’t be long before the harvester will make its way to the field and reap what was sown a few months back.

With fall fast approaching, we know it is just about harvest time. It won’t be long before farmers will be in their fields to bring in their crops. For those who till the ground it is an exciting time of year.

When it comes to the Kingdom of God, it is always harvest time. As Jesus reminds us, “*the fields are white for the harvest.*” There are people all around us with all sorts of needs who would do well to hear a good word about Jesus.

What is needed are those ready and willing to offer that word.

Let’s hear what Jesus has to say about such things. Our scripture lesson today is from Matthew 9:35-38. Let’s hear this from God’s word.

## **Matthew 9:35-38**

*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

## **Making Disciples Who Make Disciples**

A few minutes ago, we heard from Lisa Leonard about our efforts in discipleship. We heard a lot about what it means to take "*one step closer*." Hers is a challenge to dig more deeply into what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. While that entails learning more about Christ and what it means to follow him, *One Step Closer* is a wonderful training for those interested in bringing in the sort of harvest Jesus talks about in Matthew 9:37-38.

It is my prayer that when it comes to making disciples we are not just making disciples, but making disciples who make disciples. Discipleship is always an inside/out proposition.

In so many words, we need to do as Jesus did. He was all about making disciples, there is no denying that. More importantly, Jesus was all about making sure that those who followed him would then go and make disciples themselves.

Jesus had that expectation for Peter and Andrew, James and John, and the rest of the disciples. There was a high expectation of multiplication. Jesus was the same way with the seventy-two he sent out to the towns and villages of Galilee. Jesus was not only concerned about their spiritual growth, but how that spiritual growth would translate into them making disciples.

The expectation of making disciples is very much a part of the so-called Great Commission. "*Therefore, go,*" says Jesus, "*and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" (Matthew 28:19-20)

## **Do As Jesus Did**

As I have mentioned on other occasions, Cheryl and I took a trip to the Holy Land a few years back. It was an absolutely wonderful experience. There are all sorts of memories from that trip, each formative in their own way.

I was particularly struck by the couple of days we spent in and around the Sea of Galilee. They were our first days there and they made quite an impression. It was in and around the Sea of Galilee that Jesus spent the early part of his ministry. He itinerated from place to place tending to the needs of the people there and sharing the good news of the coming Kingdom.

Our scripture for this morning shares that Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

Jesus went where the people were; he didn't just wait for them to come to him.

Christ's teachings stuck a cord with people. He met them where they were. He didn't place a heavy load on them like the scribes and Pharisees, but rather led them to a place of freedom and abundant life.

*"Come to me," says Jesus, "all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30)

Many took him up on that. They not only needed to respond, they wanted to respond.

Christ's teaching, preaching, and healing met the needs of the whole person—body, mind, soul, and spirit. Jesus was not just interested in a person's soul salvation, but was interested in meeting a person's every need—eternal and otherwise. Jesus stands ready not only to meet your needs, but the needs of those around you. Christ is just that way.

In a word, we need to do as Jesus did. We need to go and meet people right where they are, seeking to meet their needs for this life and the next.

### **Christ's Compassion**

The scripture records that as Jesus made his way from town to town he had compassion upon those he met. Christ was burdened by their pain. He sensed their need. He knew they were very much in need of his direction. As the scripture says, they were *"like sheep without a shepherd,"* and Jesus was ready to be that shepherd.

In John 10:11 Jesus says, *"I am the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* (John 10:11) Jesus was willing to go to any lengths to convince people of his love, even if it meant dying on the cross.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm so aptly reminds us, *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name sake."* (Psalm 23:1-3)

There's a big difference between seeing people as simply a part of a crowd and seeing them as members of flock in need of care and compassion. When it comes to compassion for others, it comes down to how you view them. That's particularly true during this season in which we find ourselves, a season where we are grappling with issues of justice and fairness for all.

The scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day looked through a lens that saw the crowds as nothing more than chaff. They were sinners that simply didn't measure up. Jesus, on the other hand, looked at the crowds and saw a field ready for harvest. While they may have been sinners, he was willing to go to any length to convince them of his love and forgiveness.

### ***The Harvest Is Plentiful, But the Workers Are Few***

There has never been a more important time to deliver a little good news. It seems that we are bombarded by bad news all the time and we are all getting a little weary of it.

I know for me when I pull myself away from it all and seek to connect with God I am immediately refreshed. I encourage you to do the same. I also encourage you not to squander the opportunity to offer the good news about Jesus in the midst of all the bad that's going on.

The harvest is there, what's needed are workers to get out in the field and bring it in. That includes you and me.

There are plenty of people all around us who are "*ripe for the harvest.*" It comes to you and me to be ever vigilant, ever ready, when it comes to reaching out in the name of our Lord.

Christ's plan is to use us--however, whenever, and wherever—to make a difference in his name.

- Just the other night I had the honor to share a word of witness to my neighbor across the street. I can't tell you how thrilled I was to do that.
- As we heard at the start of this sermon series, Ysaswi Pulavarti shared the faith with a group of young men while on vacation with his family.
- Three weeks ago we heard from Jenna Wheelock who delivers food on a weekly basis in the west end of Louisville in conjunction with a group called Linking Arms.
- We have any number of people here at Saint John who regularly help at the Bread of Life Food Pantry doing much the same thing in our own community.
- Just last week we heard from Don and Leanne Dugan about their work at Highpoint in LaGrange. They are building some really important relationships that I am convinced will bear good fruit for God's Kingdom.
- Just recently, Betsy Keefe visited some sixty families offering not only a gift bag for their children upon the start of school, but the sort of support that comes from one who goes out in the name of the Lord.

*"The fields are white for the harvest."* What Christ needs are workers to go out into those fields.

The religious landscape of the United States continues to change at a rapid clip. And think of it, the statistics I am about to quote don't even begin to take into consideration how things have changed during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

In a couple of Pew Research Center telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion. That's down 12% over the past decade.

Meanwhile, those who consider themselves religiously unaffiliated, now stands at 26%, up from 17% just ten years ago. That percentage has raised so much in large part due to a generation of young people who just don't see the need for religion.

There is a harvest field out there and the Lord of the harvest calls us to get out there and make a difference in his name.