

A young woman standing beside her car along I-80 looked hopelessly at a flat tire, and a man stopped to help. He changed the tire for her and began to let the car down off the jack. 'Please let the jack down easily,' she said. 'My husband is asleep in the back seat.'

God has done something astounding recently: something very near and dear to us. What God did effects all of us. It was not the Powerball lottery nor was it the election. It was the harvest of our land. To many people it is probably not something that they would label as astounding, and maybe some would not even credit God's hand in the harvest itself, but I do. The harvest of this nation is something that I pray about routinely. I marvel at the results which are the wonderful works of God in my sight. Last month I was able to fly over the Midwest and see the fields and fields ripe for the harvest. Yet, I can see how it is possible to sleep through the harvest in this age. We have, as a society, become more and more detached from our agrarian roots as a nation. We don't participate in the harvest as in days past. Perhaps, we take much that I would call God-given, for granted.

[1] The Harvest

The Bible tells us that there is a law of the harvest. I mean "law" like we use the word for "the law of gravity." The law is simple and the law is sure. According to Holy Scripture, you only reap what you sow.

The law is mentioned by Paul in Galatians 6:7

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

Farmers who plant wheat, don't harvest corn.

Farmers who don't plant anything, don't harvest anything.

You could say that it is God's law.

I would like to proclaim the wonderful work of God in the harvest. A harvest that was much more celebrated in earlier times than it may be today. The harvest is celebrated in the book of Ruth chapter 3 if you want a quick picture. When I first entered the ministry, the United Methodists had special Sunday, Rogation Sunday, to acknowledge our dependence upon God for seedtime and harvest. The word rogation comes from the Latin verb "rogare," meaning "to ask", which reflects the beseeching of God for the appeasement of his anger and for protection from calamities.

Harvest was a time of hard work and many people were involved. A former parishioner used to tell of sowing fields of tomatoes and then paying neighbors and teens to help pick them off the ground. He paid the workers 85 cents per bushel they picked. That must have been back-breaking work. I remember being hired by farmers to help bring in the hay in season, working from the dew was gone to dark for \$1 an hour.

Can you imagine mowing a field of grain with a scythe? How did those people do that? Yet, I can see their satisfaction at the harvest and their appreciation for God providing the seed, soil, sun and rain for the growth, and the resulting harvest.

Certainly the harvest is God-orchestrated to whatever degree you may give human efforts credit for the abundance. It is so much more abundant since we have industrialized agriculture, and how well-timed when the world's population has spiked. Yet, God's hand is in all this, as Psalm 145:15-16 indicates:

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

[2] The Harvest of the spirit

But that is just one kind of harvest. Galatians 6:8 mentions law of the harvest:

“Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

This is God's law too!

If we sow to the flesh, that is, spend our life in the pursuit of material wealth to the exclusion of all else and our family falls apart or we are estranged from them, then a sort of destruction occurs. If we sow to the flesh pursuing alcohol abusively, or addition to illicit drugs, or follow a promiscuous lifestyle of some type, we then may well reap destruction. If we dwell with long-term unresolved anger, or if we try to live in an unforgiving attitude, we may find ourselves consumed within in a destructive way. That is the law of the harvest of the spirit also.

However, if we live aiming at a wholesome life, a holy life, a dedicated life: a life of love, charity, hope and honesty, then we may live a life of grace and peace—eternally through Jesus Christ, being clothed in Christ's righteousness.

This is the law of the harvest of the Spirit in Galatians 6:8.

This doesn't mean that we will never have trials but that we can triumph over our trials. That is the law of the harvest of the Spirit as well.

Consider Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther, and Winston Churchill for a moment. These men would be considered to be successful people who triumphed in life. Yet,

“Abraham Lincoln is said to have had fitful moods of depression. Melancholy was the term typically applied to describe his moods.

Winston Churchill acknowledged that he was periodically overtaken by the ‘black dog’ of depression.

Martin Luther wrote that recurrent depression brought him ‘close to the gates of death and hell...shaken by desperation.’” [Bible Illustrator, "Despondency", index 669, 5/1987.]

Each had major times of disappointment and discouragement in life, but all are considered to have triumphed over their trials, which is a harvest of the Spirit.

Christians sow their share of tears in a lifetime. None of us are immune to illness, accident, tragedy, discouragement or despair. With God's help, and the leading of his Holy Spirit, we come through the trials of life with faith. We don't come out quite the same person we were when we entered those times, but nevertheless we are preserved in the faith.

Proverbs 24:16 indicates that The righteous man may fall 7 times, but rises 8.

I do not make light that the the battles of flesh and Spirit are heavy-duty and hard-wearing. Like Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, and in harvest terms, it is true that:

“There is no oil without squeezing the olives,
No wine without pressing the grapes,
No fragrance without crushing the flowers, and
No real joy without sorrow.”

[Bible Illustrator, "Afflictions", index 490.]

And this is true, not just for men as the following story might indicate.

"Mrs. Monroe lives in Darlington, Maryland. She's....just like any other mother across America." ...and is mentioned in the book: "How to Win Over Worry."

"She came home one afternoon from the grocery store and walked into her home and everything looked pretty much the same, though it was a little bit quieter than usual. She looked into the middle of the living room and 5 of her darlings were sitting around in a circle, exceedingly quiet, doing something, with something in the middle of a circle. So she put down the sacks of groceries and walked over closely and looked and saw that they were playing with 5 of the cutest skunks you can imagine.

She was instantly terrified and she said, 'Run children, run!' Each child grabbed a skunk and ran, in 5 different directions. She was beside herself and screamed louder, more frantically... It so scared the children that each one squeezed his skunk! As the writer put it, 'Skunks don't like to be squeezed!'"

[-Bible Illustrator, "Afflictions", index 490.]

We just had another hurricane so let me take our thoughts there. It is said that and:

"I had always thought of hurricanes as something mankind could do without. But recently I learned that they are necessary to maintain a balance in nature. These tropical storms, with winds up to 150 miles an hour and accompanied by torrential rains, glaring lightning, and rumbling thunder, can be devastating. Yet scientists tell us they are tremendously valuable. They dissipate a large percentage of the oppressive heat which builds up at the equator, and they are indirectly responsible for much of the rainfall in North and South America. Meteorologists therefore no longer use cloud-seeding techniques to prevent them from being formed. They are convinced that hurricanes actually do more good than harm.

The Bible teaches us that the afflictions of God's people are like that. Though they bring temporary pain and grief, they can produce eternal dividends."

[Bible Illustrator, "Afflictions", index 490, 5/1986.]

Paul says in regard to the harvest of the spirit in Galatians 6:9

Let us not become weary in doing good,
for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

This is the law of the spirit in life.

[3] The Harvest of the Souls

Jesus' raising of Lazarus, one of the 7 signs in the Gospel of John is a sign to tell us that through Jesus there will be a harvest of souls. Jesus desires the same. Even when Jesus talks of the end times, he does so in terms of a harvest. A great example is his parable of the Wheat and the Tares.]

Lastly, Paul says in Galatians 6:10 says:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

If we will sow the seed of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people, we may be assured that we may participate in reaping souls for eternity. That is the law of the harvest too. This is God's promise in John 3:16 to bring souls into Christ's kingdom.

We recently watched the pageantry of the funeral of Queen Elizabeth, so that is fresh in our minds. Using that picture of those stately churches, let me share another story by Rev. James Merritt.

A group was touring London, England. While touring that beautiful city, they went to Westminster Abbey, the beautiful church where all of the monarchs of England are crowned, royalty are married and famous people are buried. While a tour guide was explaining the history behind Westminster Abbey, a lady interrupted the guide and said, "Young man! Will you stop your chatter for a moment and tell me one thing—has anyone been saved here lately?"

That really is the question that may be asked of every church. Has anyone been saved here lately? Someone has said, "If a man has a soul (and he has), and if that soul can be won or lost for eternity (and it can), then the most important work in the world is to bring men and women to Jesus Christ.

The Bible speaks often in terms of harvests. The law of the harvest that Paul mentioned reminds us that there is a wonderful harvest of souls desired by Jesus Christ of which we may be a part.