**A Harvest for my Father (6-18-17)**

**Father’s Day**

Exodus 19: 2-8 Romans 5: 1-8 Matthew 9: 35-10: 8

**Responsive Reading**: 1 Corinthians 15: 35-44

**Summary:** Plant a thought, reap an action. Plant an action, reap a habit. Plant a habit, reap a character. Plant a character, reap a destiny. Plant destinies, reap a civilization. The harvest is here, gather in what God has planted.

 Don gave a really eye-opening message on Pentecost. The authority Jesus has to forgive sins is passed on to us, along with the work of His Cross. Perhaps this on-going work of forgiving grace is what Jesus meant when He said, “Take up your cross and follow me.” Jesus suffered and paid for all; we are much more limited, but we can do our part to ease God’s pain.

 I feel that this may be why suffering, and even martyrdom, brought such joy to the early Christians. They knew their pain worked with Jesus to bring grace to those otherwise lost in sin. This participation in grace fulfills God’s Sinai promise to make His children priests and kings for all the nations.

 And, all that brings me to our Gospel passage, where Jesus shares His authority to heal. This happens well before Jesus shares His authority to forgive. Jesus sets his disciples loose on Israel, a mission which he will later expand to “Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the Earth,” including the Gentiles. Let me now introduce a very sobering thought: the harvest is ready, whose seeds, exactly, are the now-ripened plants?

 Remember that parable about the wheat and the tares? The owner – God – plants good seed in His field – the Earth. His enemy – Satan – scatters weeds amongst the good seed, and the plants grow together. The weeds are not culled for fear of uprooting the good crops.

 1 Corinthians 15: 35-44 extends this metaphor. God has planted, in the world and in each of us, good seed. Those seeds have grown, but alongside them are weeds; we all have them. God’s church gathers to harvest: not crops of wheat, oats, rice or corn, but love, joy, patience, self-control, gentleness, compassion, faith, hope, and love. In short, we harvest the fruits of the Holy Spirit that you are learning about at Tuesday night Bible study. This harvest is not only within the interior gardens of our spirits, but also springs up in the fertile and varied cultures of humanity.

 Christians harvest God’s crop. Other laborers harvest alongside the people of God, but they are more interested in the grapes of wrath and the vintage therefrom. Terrorists harvest terror, fear, intolerance, exploitation, self-interest, and tyranny. In short, evil harvests the tares. Did you think we planted? God does that and so does Satan. We reap, but God’s laborers are few. We urgently gather ripe spiritual life or else watch the agents of the enemy rake in rotted, spiritual death. Jesus taught, in Matthew 10:28, “Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell.”

 Although I support the affirmation our church makes that God will, in His perfect timing, redeem us all, this time – now – is my watch. The scriptural images I see give me urgency. It does not matter if evil manifests its illness via unclean spirits or via the environmental pollutions spread by those so spiritually dead that they care more for shareholder profit than for clean water and air for their children. This is my watch, I can’t just watch the bullies tear into the tares and leave the good crops without a prayer!

 So, after Easter, after Mother’s Day, after Pentecost, Memorial Sunday, and Trinity Sunday, we have today: Father’s Day. Not only do I remember my father and ancestors on Earth, but now is my chance to give the Father Who planted me here the gift He really wants. Now, there is an awesome thought: us, giving God what God longs for. Nope, not cufflinks, nor a tie. God wants His harvest.

 Taking our pain and the guilt of our sin, Jesus harvested us, and recruits us to God’s mission field. Jesus grants us His authority to forgive sins and shares His joy and glory of suffering for God’s harvest. This happens as we accept our own crosses and forgive as He does. The crops are fully grown now; we can tell the wheat from the tares easily. It is our job to gather God’s good crops, not to condemn and tear up the tares as so many churches are tempted to do. Let’s get on with it, the time grows short and, as our closing hymn will remind us, “Work, for the night is coming when man works no more.”

 Godspeed the harvest, and God grant that the church will say . . . Amen!