

**Osler Mennonite Church**

**September 24, 2017**

**"Bearing fruit for the harvest" – by Florence Driedger**

**Scripture: Matt 9:35-38; Matt 20:1-16**

**Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I bring you greetings from Peace Mennonite church who are meeting today and are looking forward to a time of thanksgiving during this fall season with its beautiful skies and lands which display the wonders of God who preserves us, calls us and enables us to live out the love of God in many ways.**

**Harvest, fall and thanksgiving all go together. As a congregation and a church of congregations we have so very much to be thankful for. As we talked last Friday and Saturday in the mini retreat, we have chosen to be Christ centered and sent. So this morning I hope to discuss with you the theme taking into consideration both your welcome to a new IVEPer and the fact you have had a number of persons retire recently and weave in the harvesting of the fruit of your labors.**

**In the first scripture passage Matt describes the harvest and the fact the laborers are few. Jesus calls on the disciples to pray for laborers to reap the abundant harvest. In the second passage we hear a parable of the reapers and their pay.**

**Lets consider the concept of harvest. What might Jesus have been talking about. Some would say He may have been talking about all those who are longing to hear the Good News and few who feel capable or able to take on this task. On the other hand lets consider the harvest as all of us who have matured through the years of following Jesus and nurtured by your parents who took you to SS, who have prayed for you, who walked with you in joys and sorrows, your congregation who gave you opportunities to worship, sing, meet others who have values which were grounded in faith, and the larger church of which we all are a part of. You have been nurtured by being able to volunteer for MCC, in**

**your local school, in Person to person programs and some of you in Mennonite Disaster service or voluntary service at home or abroad and many, many other opportunities. What a wonderful heritage that brought us here today. What we can thank God for.**

**We also know some fruit and crops take a long time to mature, and other just a few short weeks. So if you are young, remember you too are part of the congregation and can be part of the crop which is still growing, but also be or become a reaper.**

**We all are precious as the beloved of God. And we are being called to be Christ centered as the beloved of God. You are the harvest which then becomes the seed for the next planting and harvesting.**

**But a harvest is useless if someone does not take care of the fruit, provide opportunities for its use and some for the next season of planting, growing, and harvesting. There is a cycle in the life of a plant even as there is a cycle in the life of a person, a family, a congregation and a church.**

**Parallel to the cycle just described is the importance of the tending, nurturing and reaping of the harvest. Let us now turn to the second passage we read.**

**Again this idea described in the passage turns us on our heads when we think in today's terms. Why would an owner of a crop pay people the same dollar when one works all day or just an hour? Is this not unfair? Why did the owner not determine ahead of time the total number of people he needed for the whole day, hire them and then pay them all the same?**

**One could speculate many things. It could be the weather was changing and he needed to hurry the process. It could be he did not realize just how abundant the crop really was. It could be some reapers were more experienced than others and he had not chosen as many as he found he needed. It may be there was a ladder which broke down and there was time used to fix the ladder. Be that as it may, his end goal was to complete the harvest.**

**On the other hand, he may have known he would need more workers, but he also knew some were older and could not work in the heat of the sun. Some might have been stronger than others and he felt some workers worked equally hard as the others, but not as fast. Or as a community member he knew some were struggling with finances, large family, or other issues and needed the compassion and support even if they worked only an hour which gave this reaper the sense he was valued and had a place in the community and society.**

**I suspect the owner saw the big picture which included not just his own increase in wealth but also the health of the community, the spirit of working together, the betterment in the financial security for all which could then provide food for all whether rich or poor. God was a God for all. All were the beloved of God and the owner also recognized he was the beloved of God who could share the abundance beyond his interest in himself. He was Christ centered and sent to share of what he had harvested with all.**

**In my view, the owner used a totally different value in his approach to work from our view of labor. It represented what we often call the upside down kingdom.**

**Now lets look at the harvest and the reaping of the harvest and what they have to say to us today. Each one of you sitting here today is part of the harvest. You have so many gifts, so much wisdom gained through your years of dedication to God's work, you have so many resources at your disposal, you know so many people in the community, and have many skills. You can sing, young people you can use the internet and electronics for communication, sew, write letters, love others, visit the lonely and sick, pray for many, smile when you meet someone, and on and on. Sure some of us can only do one or two of these, but together you are strong and have so much to contribute and do contribute.**

**When asked last Saturday who are you, we agreed we often don't recognize who we are until someone from the outside describes us or we are asked to think about it. We were asked to reflect on who we were and came up with many characteristics because we were together with others who saw**

things in us we might not have seen. Whether retiring or new to the community we all have gifts which can be harvested. And all can be sent with the tools, the wisdom and love which flows from being the beloved of God – the center of who we as followers of Christ.

And let us look at what we reap when we are sent. We have been given much as outlined. The reapers were all paid the same. When we are engaged in serving, does it really matter whether we served for one year or many years? When I listen intently to one person who is hurting and needs someone who will take the time to hear him or her out, I gain the same amount of value from the experience as I do when I hear out 10 persons. When I am able to help one person find joy, or 20 , does it make a difference to me and to those who have found joy? Each one has found joy. When you love one child or five children it is love which is experienced and immeasurable just as when someone finds joy, or finds comfort in knowing he will have enough to eat from the dollar the owner gave. The measure was not the money but the end result in being acknowledged by the owner. We are given gifts when we serve which are not of material worth. When we are sent we receive immeasurably.

Now lets go back to the analogy of the harvest and reapers and its application to us here today. We know there have been variations in the harvest due to many factors such as rain, soil, wind, hail, sun which affected how productive the land has been. In some fields there have been problems which have reduced the yield. However there is a harvest, if not this year then the next. While we might decry the fact there have been variations in the conditions each of us have had in our lives causing some of us not to be as productive as we would have liked, the harvest and what happens to it is what is important.

When the harvest is done and the grain is stored it is important the storage is good so that it is not lost because of the elements of weather, infestations or rodents. It is precious. As you grow older you have a large storage of experiences. There is wisdom, a history, and you provide continuity in times of turbulence and change. You can provide a sense of centeredness in

God and provide a mooring when the wind is blowing. The issues that might disturb a young parent may not seem nearly as traumatic if shared with an older person who has raised five children. In some places, schools or homes for senior, there are moves to have families with children live in the same homes they build for seniors. Seniors provide service for the children and children provide service for seniors. It not only helps relieve the loneliness of some older persons, but also is a way of harvesting some of the knowledge and life experience of the older generation. How many times have you heard someone say “I wish I had asked my grandfather, my grandmother, my mother, my aunt more questions.”? Or bemoans the fact “ I don’t know anything about my past and now they are gone.” The harvest is lost. Young people lose valuable life stories when not kept. The harvest is precious and it needs careful attention.

As older persons, our sharing of these stories is not to give the impression we were/are perfect. It is to provide a sense of identity in Christ, a sense of history and a sense of life which is precious and we are thankful for the nurture and care of the community, the church our families and friends.

It is to help those who hear our stories recognize we all are vulnerable, none of us are perfect and we accept failure as a way of learning and living. What God expects of us is for us to be FAITHFUL and in humility we share how we have walked our journey in trying to be faithful.

What else happens to the harvest today? Much of what is harvested today is sold. What happens to the shipped grain? It is included in a shipment with many other loads of grain from other fields, other farms, even other provinces. Much of the grain is processed into other products. Other persons take what the grain has to offer and combine it with other substances and it becomes products such as bread, pasta, muffins, cakes, etc. It is mixed together with other types of products such as oil, honey, sugar, salt, fruit and then becomes a product providing nutrition and enjoyment for the person who is eating the meal. Young people often take on the tasks in the process of using the grain harvested, consume the products and grow into adulthood. We are all together in the process. And all are needed.

Even so, when we allow our ideas, our experiences, our wisdom to be harvested and it becomes part of the combined wisdom of others, kneaded and baked, iced and presented, our own thought may not be visible to the eye, but it is there. **IT IS PART OF THE FUTURE.** It becomes the seed for the next generation. We are valuable, but only if we are part of the whole. Most of us will contribute, not as lone rangers, but primarily with and through others. Can we be flexible and allow ourselves to be molded even as the grape or grain of wheat is changed into something more useful and tasty, in conjunction with other grapes or products?

**We are the harvest.** If we are too rigid or tough or don't allow ourselves to be changed, we might be placed in an ornament depicting various types of grain like we have in our study. However if we are prepared to be part of the harvest for the community who is seeking reapers or for the next generation to learn from, we continually need to stand tall and allow the nutrients to go up through the stems and into the kernels. When mature it can then be broken and the chaff blown away for the core essence of the wheat to be used. May the mature years of life let the chaff be blown away so the purpose of our life in Christ can be found and used in the seeding and reaping of the harvest of those to follow.

For those who follow, there is also a mission to be fulfilled. We talked about reaping the harvest through learning from the history, the wisdom and experience of the elders. The harvest is not only an individual responsibility. Family, congregation, community all are part of the harvest process. It is they who need to consider the storage, the use and the methods by which the harvest can be used. The owner of the fields in our scripture passage carried out a major responsibility. He needed reapers, he needed many things to complete the task.

Lest we think the harvest is an individual responsibility only, let us also look at the role the church, our families and community have in the harvest. Yes in all congregations we are the harvest. But it is also import to remember, in all congregations are reapers. Sometimes we are the harvest and sometimes

**the reapers. How can the church use the talents and grain which has matured over time? We need the reapers to carefully gather in the grain, store it, use it and use some of it for seed for the next harvest. Is there room in our churches for the harvest. Are the storehouses full and do we need to make it possible for the grain, the wisdom, the maturity, the life experience to be used? Do we make it possible to have this harvest serve well beyond our store houses for others to have seeds to plant? If not, seeds get old and die.**

**The IVEPer who is with us today is here to serve. As you welcome him into your midst, you are providing him with the opportunity to learn from you, reap from your experiences and when he returns to his country, he will need to take off the chaff (those experiences which do not apply in his setting) and use the kernels in his life. Our prayer for him is he finds the Christ centered love and, experiences and reaps a God given beloved gift of love in your congregation which he can take back and in turn sow this seed in his home, congregation and community. It will be combined with many other kernels he will find as he serves. He will need time to reflect, store and keep these precious gems with him during this year so he can take them with him. Encourage him, welcome him with loving hospitality, listen to his stories and share your stories as you –young and old -- become friends in Christ.**

**We are thankful to God we can be harvested. We thank God for congregations who welcome strangers, ideas, prayer, and young and old serve so they can pass on the blessings to those around us. And as Jesus prayed, we ask the Lord of the harvest to continue to send out workers into his harvest at home and abroad to bring in the bountiful harvest and use it for his glorious purposes. Amen**