

Having Willing Hands to Harvest

There is something about late September that stirs us. It is a season of gratitude, and rightly so. Yet every year, as I look at what the harvest displays, I find myself thinking less about the produce and more about the hands that gathered it.

Jesus once looked out over the crowds and was moved with compassion, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He turned to His disciples and said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field" (Matthew 9:37-38). I find it striking that the problem Jesus identified was never the size of the harvest. The fields were full. The need was for willing hands.

I have often wondered why He asked them to pray rather than simply giving them a job. Perhaps it is because the harvest belongs to God, not to us. We do not create the growth. Paul reminded the church in Corinth of this when he wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6). That takes an enormous weight off our shoulders. We are not responsible for changing hearts. We are simply asked to turn up, to be available, and to be faithful with the small part we have been given.

And here is the wonderful irony. In Matthew's gospel, the very next thing that happens after Jesus tells the disciples to pray for workers is that He sends them out. The people praying for labourers became the answer to their own prayer. I suspect the same is often true for us. When we pray for someone to reach our neighbours, to help at the foodbank, to sit with the lonely, or to speak a word of hope into a difficult situation, we may well find the Lord gently tapping us on the shoulder.

Willing hands do not need to be skilled hands. When I think of the people who have shaped my own faith, very few of them were polished speakers or trained theologians. They were ordinary folk who made a cup of tea at the right moment, who noticed when I was quiet, who invited me round for Sunday lunch, and who prayed faithfully when I did not know they were praying at all. Their hands were willing, and God used them.

The prophet Isaiah heard the Lord asking, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" His reply was simple and wholehearted: "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). Isaiah had just been confronted with his own unworthiness, yet God touched his lips, cleansed him, and then invited him into service. That is the order of things in the kingdom. God does not wait for us to be perfect before He uses us. He meets us, forgives us, and then says, "Come and work alongside Me."

Of course, harvest work is not always easy. Anyone who has picked fruit knows about aching backs, scratched arms and long days. Jesus never pretended otherwise. He

spoke of taking up our cross, of counting the cost, and of labouring in fields we did not plant. But Paul also encourages us, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9). There is a promise woven into the effort. What we sow in faith is never wasted.

Here at Runnymede Christian Fellowship, I see the harvest all around us. There are young families moving into Egham and Englefield Green, students arriving at Royal Holloway far from home for the first time, and older neighbours living alone behind closed doors. The fields really are ripe. The question is not whether there is work to be done, but whether we are willing to be part of it.

So what might willing hands look like for you this autumn? It might be offering a lift to someone who struggles to get to church. It might be joining a prayer group, helping with the children, or simply learning the name of the person who lives three doors down. It might be having the courage to share a little of your own story of what Jesus has done in your life. None of these things are grand, but in God's hands they become seeds of eternal significance.

Jesus said, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). I would love us, as a fellowship, to take Him at His word. Let us pray for workers, and let us be ready to answer that prayer ourselves. Let us bring our willing hands, however ordinary they may feel, and place them at the Lord's disposal.

As we give thanks this harvest time for food on our tables and the goodness of God in creation, may we also give thanks that He still invites us into His work. The harvest is His. The growth is His. He graciously shares the joy of gathering it in with us.

Questions

1. Who around you might Jesus be looking at with compassion today? (**Matthew 9:36**)
2. How does knowing that God gives the growth take the pressure off? (**1 Corinthians 3:6**)
3. How does God's forgiveness make us more willing to say "Send me"? (**Isaiah 6:8**)
4. What helps you keep going when you can't see any fruit yet? (**Galatians 6:9**)
5. Where do you see ripe fields locally, and what is one step you could take? (**John 4:35**)