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## **PRESIDENT'S LETTER - AUGUST 05**

### **“A sower went out to sow his seed” (Luke 8:5).**

Jesus told parables to bring home spiritual truths in a concrete, down-to-earth way. He also indicated in Matthew 13 that parables were intended to conceal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven from those whose hearts have grown dull and whose ears are hard of hearing and whose eyes they have closed lest they understand. Jesus would remind us of the mystery of how the kingdom of heaven grows in this unbelieving world and our part in the spread of His Gospel.

Man has an irresistible urge to turn the Gospel into a new law. The legalistic religion of work righteousness is so strong that we begin to think that the spread of the kingdom of God is due in some part to our efforts. Every pastor and congregation is subject to the subtle siren of pride when things go well in our ministries. Conversely, a pastor can also show the opposite side of pride by assuming personal blame when people reject the Gospel message of salvation. In 2 Corinthians 3-4, the Holy Spirit through Paul reminds us that in the ministry of the new covenant of the forgiveness of sins, we dare not think of anything as being from ourselves. “Our sufficiency is from God” (2 Corinthians 3:5). We are just clay pots who by our lowliness emphasize the glory and power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are products of a culture that has given rise to the church growth movement. The church growth movement makes bringing people into the church a work that satisfies people's need to do something for God. The church growth movement quantifies the success of evangelism by evaluating the result by numbers. It is very easy to compare fields and congregations by the number of members and the growth in budgets. We shall see that this not the way God evaluates our ministries. The natural result of this is to find ways of increasing numbers apart from the “dull” preaching of the Gospel. The emphasis is placed on meeting people's felt needs, by using techniques that will “hook” people and bring them in. These are real dangers that face us as pastors and our people.

Jesus revealed that “The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). I have long felt that farmers are closer to God than those of us who receive a regular paycheck. The farmer sows his fields, and then he is dependent upon God. The farmer waits for God to send the rains at the proper time. He realizes that hail, grasshoppers, or drought can wipe out an entire crop. There is more of a realization of our direct dependence upon God. Jesus uses this picture to emphasize the power of the word of God and not the person who sows the seed. This parable is especially instructive for those whom God has called into the public ministry. Our work is to sow the seed of the Word of God. The results are in God's hands.

Jesus used this picture when the disciples returned from that village in Samaria and found Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman. They needed to be reminded that God sends us into His fields at His time. Jesus said, “Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows

and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors." (John 4:35-38)

The Apostle Paul also used this picture when he was forced to evaluate his own unimpressive ministry to the Corinthians congregation. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)

I still remember a Mission Festival sermon that Pastor M.J. Witt preached in Spokane, WA. The text was Matthew 9:37-38, Then Jesus said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Pastor Witt powerfully reminded us that one of the most important things we can do in these last days is to pray that God would send forth laborers to bring His harvest into the barns. The farmer knows that when the harvest is ready, he needs to get the harvest in before the rains come. It is God's field. It is God's harvest. We are God's laborers. Truly in these last days, God's harvest is white. We need to work while it is day before the night comes when no one can work.

The seed is the Word of God. Our task is to sow the seed. The results are in the hand of God who gives the increase. This parable of the sower and the seed reminds us of the miracle of growth when any seed grows and brings forth fruit. In the next months, we will be looking at what happens when this "seed" is sown.

God has provided ILC for the preparing of laborers for God's fields. At the same time, He is indicating that there are fields white for harvest. We are facing difficult financial decisions this year. Our people have consistently responded with increased offerings over the past years for the General Budget. There have been considerable additional offerings for the ILC Building Project and the Mission Development Fund. As you know, the ILC part of the Operating Budget is dependent upon student enrollment and student receipts. We ended this past fiscal year with a sizable deficit. We are also facing the twin problems for FY06 of a budget \$30,000 above CBP estimates and a possible shortfall in ILC revenues.

We need to remember that we do not just need money. Sometimes our emphasis is on the synod and its budget. We need God to provide laborers to gather in His harvest. "Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." The seed we sow is the living Word of Almighty God. Pray for our pastors, professors, and teachers. Pray for our families and those preparing for service in God's vineyard. We have been given the seed, let us be faithful laborers.

Even so, Lord, quickly come To Thy final Harvest-home;  
Gather Thou Thy people in, Free from sorrow, free from sin,  
There, forever purified, In Thy garner to abide.  
Come with all Thine angels, come, Raise the glorious Harvest-home.

TLH 574:4

We are God's fellow-workers.  
John Schierenbeck