

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
What is The Harvest All About?
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Key verse: John 4:34-38

Do you like surprises? I like surprises. Like yesterday, when we started out to drive to Westmoreland for our Baptism on the Beach, it suddenly rained. Then it stopped but it was cloudy and I was wondering whether it would rain again and our candidates for baptism would get all wet before I even dunk them on the water. But as we drove further and we reached Maryland where I took 310, the clouds parted and gave way to the sun. It was a pleasant surprise. We had a wonderful time at the beach and Kuya Gerry and Tita Marissa survived.

BTW, another pleasant surprise is that my GPS made me take 310 instead of 95 which is supposed to be faster. Because of this our trip was fairly smooth and fast because I learned that 95 was really jammed. And I thought and thought why my GPS made me take the Maryland route. And it hit me that the GPS actually looked many miles ahead and saw the big traffic and rerouted my trip right away. I remember this happening also before. And so, thanks church, because you gave me that GPS on my birthday. And it's coming soon again. I wonder what kind of surprise is waiting for me.

But I won't be surprised if you gave me a surprise birthday party. After all, I would enter my golden year. So, are you surprised? I'll be a Golden Boy. Actually, if I don't color my hair, I'll be more like a Silver Boy.

Life is full of surprises. Some are pleasant and some unpleasant. The recent downgrade of the US economy by Standard and Poor's came as a surprise to many people. Imagine, the US economy, the home of the mighty dollar, is no longer topnotch and as a result, President Obama himself was shocked and vehemently opposed the rating.

And before that, the nuclear disaster in Japan was a big surprise also to many people because nobody imagined that a highly-industrialized and advanced country could be a victim of such tragedy. But a pleasant surprise that sent many Americans jumping in great jubilation was the death of Osama Bin Laden.

Now, this chapter in the book of John which our passage this morning is taken from is a chapter that is full of surprises. This is the chapter wherein the Lord Jesus decided to stop by at a well in Samaria to ask a drink from a Samaritan woman. Please follow along as I read this passage. (Read John 4:1-42)

In verse 9, we see that the woman was surprised that Jesus spoke to her. Then, in verse 19, the woman was surprised that Jesus was actually a prophet. In verse 27, the disciples were surprised that Jesus was talking to a Samaritan woman. Then, in verses 31-33, the disciples were surprised again when Jesus said that he has food already. And in verse 39, many Samaritans were surprised by the woman's testimony that they themselves believed in Jesus.

But the greatest surprise is when Jesus told his disciples that the food he has is not physical, but spiritual. This food as he says in verse 34 is to do the will of God. And the will of God, according to him is to reap the harvest, to save souls. Why is this food for Jesus? Because this is the very reason for his being. He cannot go through a day without speaking to someone about the condition of that person's soul. Like all of us cannot go through a day without taking some food. When we get hungry, of course, our first concern is to get food. But to Jesus, saving souls is first and foremost of his concerns. He is hungry for souls to save.

In the next few verses, Jesus continues to speak about the harvest and what it is all about. And so, even though we read the story of the Samaritan woman, I'm actually going to focus on verses 34-38. Does that surprise you?

Actually, these verses, as you can see, is the lesson to learn from this experience of Jesus with the Samaritan woman.

Jesus wants us to join him in this great endeavor called "The Harvest"? And so there are three things we can learn about the harvest.

First, as Jesus says in verse 35,

1. The Harvest is Ready.

"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest."

Let me show you some pictures. (Show slides)

So, that's Nanay Monet's garden in our backyard. In her garden, the harvest is ready. In fact, she has already harvested some. And we have already tasted the harvest. Actually, I was surprised to know that she has a green thumb. I don't regret her coming to the US. Because now I can eat almost everyday nilagang okra and talong dipped in vinegar mixed with bagoong.

Now, what many of you don't know is that I also raised vegetables in the past when I was still single and living in Jersey City. That probably surprises you. My sister-in-law herself couldn't believe it when I first mentioned that I was going to start a vegetable garden. She thought that all I could do was most of the time stay inside my room, reading books, writing, playing the guitar, or doing my quiet time in bed. I just don't have pictures to prove it. There were no cell phones with cameras at the time, regular cameras were expensive and the facebook founder wasn't even born.

Anyway, a few weeks after I started the garden, I became anxious and everyday would inspect the plants one by one to see whether there was anything I could pick. And when there was none, I would say to myself, "A few days more." "A few days more."

When it comes to harvesting souls, however, Jesus Christ is saying that we don't have to wait anxiously. We don't have to count the months or weeks or

days. Because the harvest is ready. The field is ripe for harvest. All we need to do is to open our eyes and look all around us.

The field is our neighborhood. And also our workplace. Or the school. Or the streets. Or even our own families. Where there are people who need the Lord, that is our field. And Jesus is saying, "Look at those people around you. They need me. Tell them about me."

Why is the harvest ready? Because people everywhere are troubled. It was true during the time of Jesus and it is true also today. Back then, the Jews were being oppressed by the Romans. In their condition, only Jesus could give them hope.

In our time, nothing has changed. Only Jesus can give us hope. Next month, we're going to observe the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Twin Towers in New York. That tragedy has brought into sharper focus our need for Jesus. Steel and stone and glass cannot protect us. They cannot give us security. Neither money nor fame. Neither guns nor fighter planes. We cannot trust in man-made devices. Psalm 20:7 says, *"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."*

Admittedly, the times are perilous. We're living in dangerous times. People are aware of this and that's why more and more are turning to spiritual things. Many people are searching. That's the reason for the popularity of those psychic hotlines on TV. Who is that celebrity who promotes them? Aha, you've been

watching. Now, even if Dionne Warwick is your favorite singer, don't call that number. Then, also, in recent years, books that explore the spiritual world have become bestsellers like Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the Celestine Prophecy and Embraced by the Light, to name a few. Don't buy them.

So, don't believe the religious pundits who say that many people are not interested in religion anymore. Do you know that atheists comprise only an insignificant portion of the population? It just doesn't seem so because of their media exposure. By and large, people are hungry for spiritual things. People are longing for God. People are looking for salvation. That is why we must offer them Jesus.

Let me ask you, are you troubled this morning? Did you come here looking for hope? Did you come here wondering whether there's any reason for living?

My friend, let me tell you that Jesus died for your sins. Your sins separate you from a holy God that's why you don't have peace in your heart. There's no one who can save you except Jesus. He is the sinless and perfect one who gave his life so that you may live and have life abundantly.

When he died on the cross, he carried your sins on his body and nailed them on the cross so that you don't have to carry the weight of your sins anymore. You are forgiven and free. But there's more. Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day as the Bible says. He rose to conquer sin and death forever. Because he rose, you too can rise. You can have eternal life. That's his promise.

He says, "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in has eternal life." In John 3:16, the Bible also says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Because the harvest is ready, therefore, **The Harvest Needs Reapers.**

The first part of verse 36 tells us, "*Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life.*"

Who among you here has a vegetable garden aside from Nanay Monet? Who among you here did not harvest their vegetables?

My point is, when you grow vegetables, you have the intention of harvesting them later. You did not plant them just for display or for them to rot. They're not like flowers that you smell and admire. They are there for you to pick and eat. So, when you see those tomatoes turning red, you come out and pick them. You don't call your neighbor and say, "Hey, neighbor, just look at those big, red tomatoes. Aren't they pretty? I have some more here, you see.

I'll leave them there because big, red tomatoes make my garden really look beautiful." What will your neighbor think of you?

And so, a harvest that is ripe needs to be reaped. To reap, you need reapers, of course. If you don't reap, the harvest will rot and go to waste.

The harvest is ready but the harvest needs reapers. Jesus says in Luke 10:2, "*The workers are few.*"

That's the sad state of affairs, my brothers and sisters. There are just a few workers in the field. How the heart of God must ache for the hundreds and thousands and millions of lost souls that are not being reached by the gospel. Because only a few would like to work in the field. Only a few would like to move their feet and soil their hands in this most important work that God has entrusted to us!

So, what do we do? Jesus says, pray! Pray that God sends more workers. Pray that God calls more Christians to his service. And pray that more Christians will respond and obey God's call for service.

No Christian endeavor ever succeeded without prayer. Much more so when it comes to the saving of souls. My brothers and sisters, we must become more prayerful if we want to grow this church. If we want to see more souls saved, we must pray.

But, you know, perhaps, we are already the answer to that prayer. What I mean is, God has already called us and we are not just responding. You see, many Christians are just holding on until the Lord comes again. Just sitting in the sidelines and watching the others do the work. We really don't see much soulwinning. When you speak with a Jehovah's Witness, one of the first

things they'll ask you is, "If you're really a disciple of Christ, why don't you witness as often as you should?"

My brothers and sisters, witnessing and saving souls is a great privilege. We are harvesting souls for eternal life. The reason we have hope for eternal life is because of someone who took the time to share the gospel with us.

Let's return the compliment, so to speak. It's now our turn to give this hope to our loved ones, neighbors, classmates, officemates, whoever. Many lives are being wasted because they don't know Jesus.

The great Baptist preacher Charles H. Spurgeon said, "I would rather be the means of saving one soul from death than to be the greatest orator on earth."

And Proverbs 11:30 says, "*He who wins souls is wise.*"

The harvest is ready. The harvest needs reapers. And for those who would reap,

The Harvest has Rewards.

Let's look at the last part of verse 36.

Now, I'm going to talk about my garden. And so the day came. The day came for me to harvest the vegetables that have grown in our backyard. There were ampalayas or bitter melons. There were tomatoes. There were cucumbers and

zucchinis. And there was even one long string bean. Only one survived, you see.

We had so much bitter melons that a day wouldn't pass without a viand made of bitter melon. And I think my mom made all sorts of dishes involving bitter melon. Bitter melon and eggs, bitter melon and soft noodles, mongo with bitter melon, you name it, we ate it. I think I ate so much it showed on my skin.

But you know, every time I went to the garden, and picked the vegetables, I felt so good. It was just pure joy holding those vegetables in my hands, a sheer delight to behold them. If you ask Nanay, I'm sure that's how she feels too. So, whenever I was feeling down I would just go out in the garden and pick some vegetables.

My brothers and sisters, this is the same kind of feeling you get when you join in the harvest of souls. It is a feeling like no other. Some of you I'm sure could also attest to that. Especially our missionaries who go to the Philippines year after year. And it makes you wonder why they do it despite the hardships, the challenges, the lack of resources.

I don't know but somehow it is just so exciting to see someone else get saved. It is so exciting to see someone become a new creation. It is just like the feeling you get when a new baby arrives in the family. No wonder that the Bible says that the angels rejoice in heaven over one sinner who repents. So,

just think of the great joy that we bring to our Father in heaven when we lead someone to Christ.

That is the reward we get on earth. In heaven, a reward awaits us, too. Look at Revelation 22:12, *“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.*

Make no mistake about it. Even though we are saved already and God therefore will not condemn us to hell, we will still be judged by the Lord according to our service for him. And I believe saving souls is at the top of the Lord’s list.

Jesus expects his followers to be productive while they wait for him. That’s why he gave us our marching orders. He wants us to be about his business of saving souls.

During WWII, Gen. Douglas McArthur was in the Philippines to fight the Japanese. Then, it was necessary for him to leave to attend to other countries that needed his help. Before he left, he promised “I shall return” and then directed the combined American and Filipino forces to repel the enemy as much as they could. And that’s exactly what they did. They followed their orders and were successful in not letting the whole country fall under the Japanese. Until McArthur returned and liberated the entire Philippines. And the courageous men who risked and lost their lives in the defense of freedom received their medals for valor and bravery.

We, too, will receive our reward when we get to heaven. If we followed our orders. If we remained faithful to our calling as soldiers of Christ, snatching lives out of Satan's hands. When we get to heaven, wouldn't it be sweet to hear the Lord Jesus say to us, "Well done, my good and faithful servant"? But if we're not faithful, perhaps what we're going to hear Jesus say is, "Well, you're done."

God is looking for people who will stand in the gap. People who are willing to make a sacrifice in order to save a soul. We don't have to be eloquent. We don't have to have all the training in the world although training is necessary. All we need to do is to open our hearts to the Lord and obey. In our weakness and inadequacy, God can use us.

There was a soldier in the U.S. army who just finished his tour of duty and was now discharged from the service. He was in the highway and decided to hitchhike. After a few minutes, a car stopped in front of him and the driver, who was smiling, signaled him to hop in. He went inside the car and then immediately introduced himself to the driver. "Private First Class Robert Thompson, Sir."

"Nice to meet you, soldier. My name is Bill."

Robert learned that Bill has just attended a business conference in New York. He was driving back to Chicago where he lived. He also learned that he has a wife and two children. Being a Christian, Robert suddenly felt that he needed

to share Jesus with Bill. After being in the army too long, however, he really did not know anymore how to communicate the gospel. He tried to put off the thought but it persisted. When he was close to his destination somewhere in Pennsylvania, he decided to share Jesus in the best way he can. All the while, Bill was listening and nodding his head. Then, he started to cry and stopped on the roadside. On the roadside, he accepted Jesus. Then, as they parted ways, Bill handed Robert his business card.

Five years passed and Robert was in Chicago to attend a business conference himself. Remembering Bill, he called the number on the business card. Someone said that he no longer worked there and so he decided to find his address.

A woman opened the door. He briefly introduced himself. "Hi, my name is Robert. I met your husband five years ago on the road. He gave me a ride as he was coming back from New York."

The woman gave him a sad look. "Do you know that my husband never made it back?"

"What do you mean?"

"He met an accident on the road."

"I'm sorry. I don't know whether you're a Christian. But you know I believe he is in heaven because he accepted Jesus after I shared with him the gospel."

Suddenly, the woman cried.

“Did I say something wrong?” Robert asked.

Softly, the woman said, “No, these are tears of joy. Robert, I am a Christian, too. For years, I’ve been praying for the salvation of my husband. God led you to my husband. He knew what was going to happen to him and he answered my prayer.”

Folks, there’s a lot of lost souls out there. Let me ask this question to you then,
“Will you join in reaping the harvest?”

Let us Pray...