

“Come, labor on ...”

Whenever I hear today’s Gospel with Jesus saying “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest...” I think of the hymn “Come, labor on.” (Hymnal 541)

Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain, while all around us waves the golden grain? And to each servant does the Master say, “Go work today.

Go work today! It is quite a “God-incidence” that our Mission Team leave today for Eastern North Carolina to help rebuild homes destroyed by last fall’s hurricane and floods. Go work today. Today is our Associate Rector, Jason Roberson’s, first Sunday at Grace. Go work today Jesus says to each and every one of us.

I can first remember singing the hymn, “Come, labor on,” as a 10th grader in boarding school at our Sunday evening Vesper service. It was one of our Headmaster’s favorites and we sang it often. The Headmaster understood the Christian faith to be more about action, work, than about belief and words.

In fact, when I first went to Tabor Academy in 1967, we had our Sunday evening Vesper services in a large common room where we moved all the chairs out of the dining room and crammed 350 boys together to sing hymns, pray and hear a “talk.” The Headmaster was concerned about the “God is dead” movement of the late 60s. So he build a chapel on the highest part of the campus and we moved our Vesper services into the new chapel. As so many New England boarding schools were making chapel services optional, our school added chapel services with required attendance. Go work today.

I did a little research on this hymn, “Come, labor on,” and discovered that it was written by a Scottish writer who wanted to inspire adults to go out into the growing cities and teach the Christian faith. She belonged to the “free church” and was committed to mission, growing the faith.

The tune, written especially for this text, was composed by an English organist and choir director who served for many years at York Cathedral. He left in 1913 to go to New York City and begin the famous choir school at St. Thomas’ on Fifth Avenue.

“Go work today,” words based upon today’s Gospel from Luke’s Special Section – Jesus’ teaching about discipleship. And also based upon some familiar words from John’s Gospel, Jesus telling his disciples “one sows and another reaps ... others have labored, and you have entered into their labor...” (4:35-38)

There are several images, metaphors for discipleship in the New Testament. Jesus talks about laborers, farmers, fishermen. St. Paul writes about builders and athletes. These activities take hard work. Think about all the work the women have put into their soccer career to represent the U.S. and to win another world cup! When Michael Jordan first went to the University of North Carolina he told the coaches that he wanted to be the best player to ever come out of U.N.C. The coaches told him that if that’s what he wanted, he’d better be the hardest working player in the history of U.N.C. Coach Roy Williams tells this story in his autobiography titled “Hard Work.” Coach Williams knows a lot about basketball; he knows even more about faith and life.

As disciples, we always have work to do. There's no summer vacation. Even when we are on vacation from our jobs, we are still working for Jesus. In today's Gospel, we hear some of Jesus' teachings about this work of discipleship.

"The harvest is plentiful." There are so many possibilities. People are starving to know God's love, God's peace, God's justice. Our work is to teach, to heal, to build relationships, to help people know Jesus and become disciples. We are called to build up the Church; share God's love. Love is the harvest. Love is plentiful.

But this is not going to be easy. There are "wolves", "scorpions", "snakes" all around. There are those who know only the temptations of Satan – hate, violence, lies, power, selfishness. Be prepared. Be ready for the challenge. Be ready to respond to rejection, to opposition.

Working for Jesus depends upon travelling light. We cannot be burdened by material possessions and needs. We need to be free from emotional "baggage" – anxieties, fears, hurts from the past, concerns about the future. We are called to build relationships with those eager to grow in their faith. We are not to waste time with those who don't care to know about Jesus, with those who have no interest in Jesus' life and mission.

Finally, all our work for Jesus depends upon our relationship with Jesus. We can do this work because of our love, our trust, our hope in God, in the Holy Trinity – the Creator, the Redeemer, the Spirit with us now and always to comfort us and to lead us into all truth.

As the hymn proclaims:

"Away with gloomy doubts and faithless fear! No arm so weak but may
do service here: by feeblest agents may our God fulfill his righteous will..."

Come, labor on.

Galatians 6:1-16
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20