

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 9:35-38

"Coffee County and Beyond"

Jesus told us, "*The harvest truly is plentiful.*" He means that there are people to reach; there is a work to be done. And the danger of the church today is that it is not seen as the most important work. Jesus looked at the 'big picture' – the large number of people and He saw their need. He was moved with compassion.

Jesus also saw the potential of the harvest. Jesus did not focus on the hopelessness of the situation but instead He focused on hope. Jesus did not pity and do nothing but He said get the sickle and harvest them. Jesus did not see them as always being in that situation but He saw them being transformed - He saw the lost being saved. Jesus saw sinners coming to Him and becoming saints. He saw the guilty being set free. He saw the un-forgiven being forgiven. He saw those deserving hell getting grace. Instead of moaning and groaning about the bad state of affairs Jesus stressed the expectancy and hopefulness that is anticipated in the harvest. If a harvest was just hopeless – our fields would just lay and we wouldn't send out the machines to bring in the cotton, or to bring in the peanuts, and all of the other wonderful crops that grow here in South Georgia. If that were the case – hopelessness would abound.

Do you see people around us as potential saints? Or do you just look and say 'eh, what are you going to do?' We see so many getting worse and worse, that we never see the potential in the world. We are human, but where there is a lost soul and where grace still reigns supreme, there is hope and there is a potential saint. No matter how "good" or how "bad" they are - there is potential. We can't let the past fruitfulness cause us to not see the hope in this harvest. What a harvest - over half of America, over half of Coffee County available to harvest. What an opportunity! Oh Lord – what a potential!

You know it is funny, many of you know that I am involved with baseball; I am involved with our high school baseball team, and there are young ones in the middle school – 9th grade and moving up – that might show potential. They couldn't see the ball but yet the coaches have vision. It is amazing. I will ask a coach 'what do you see in that young man?' hoping that I will hear something good – and he never disappoints me – he says, "I see potential – I see that he can run faster than the wind – so I will use him as a pinch runner." By hanging around with the other guys it is going to rub off – and some of them will get better. I look at young men, you see I was a first baseman, and I watch kids put at first base – and I watch their footwork, and I watch if they are sort of stiff – or are they fluid, and they receive the ball and the footwork just happens naturally. You can see potential. God can see potential. Uh oh, now I sound like that TV commercial with Pinocchio – "you have potential and you have potential" and then the nose gets bigger. Sorry, that was not where I was going.

But – the problem is not with the Harvest – but the problem is with the lack of workers. The real problem is that not many people are interested or involved in gathering in the harvest. The play on words is obvious: Plentiful, or large and few or small. Do you know why workers, reapers or laborers are few? Well, I am sorry to say this but it's because it involves work – hard

work. Jesus does not say witnesses are few, but he says laborers are few. Reaping a harvest among sinners is hard work. A lot of times it is volunteer hard work. We are so busy doing other things – like our jobs – and that is what we do to make a living. But people are called. Jesus does not say that witnesses are few – but He says that workers are few. Reaping a harvest among sinners is hard work – and sometimes it is nasty work. It is going to cost some a whole lot of effort and some it will cost a whole lot of time. It is not easy work. You have to roll up your sleeves, you have to sweat a little, and you have to get dirty. The problem is that few are willing to do that. Last week we spoke about being the “*light of the world*” and that light attracts. So we do things that would attract them and “they will come to us.”

Have you ever planted a garden and then one morning all the beans in that garden had jumped off the vines and were piled up on your porch? Have you ever planted a garden and one morning you notice that all the corn had fallen off the stalk and had walked up and piled itself on your porch? The harvest does not come on its’ own, it has to be reaped and there my friends, lies the problem. It appears that many are preoccupied and have so many things going on to be concerned about anyone else. Unfortunately, there are churches all over America that sit and do nothing, and so the potential harvest lies unattended.

And the big question then is how to motivate people to get on board? Notice what Jesus says, “*Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.*” (Matthew 9:38 - 10:1) The field belongs to the Lord – He is the Landowner and He is asking us to pray to Him – to ask Him for that to be taken care of. The one-word answer is pray. We need to pray - because this is God’s work. What is impossible with men is possible with God. If there is going to be a great reaping of the harvest it will because of God. The harvest we want is impossible with us. New birth is a miracle of the Holy Spirit. It is based on God’s power. Only God can heal the lame, only God can raise the dead, only God can heal sickness, only God can cause dead ears to hear, only God can cause dead tongues to speak, it is His power and He calls upon us to have faith in Him to use that power – by preparing the soil.

Listen to these words from the Prophet Isaiah chapter 49, which we heard earlier this morning, “*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*” *This is what the LORD says-- the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel-- to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."* Years before Jesus was born – Isaiah was speaking about Jesus – “*the Holy One of Israel.*” God is revealing His game plan through His prophet – Isaiah. The Messiah will not be for just one group of people – but for the entire world – and you have been chosen to receive Him.

Forty days after Jesus victoriously arose from the grave, after His crucifixion – He met with His apostles on the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem and told them, as recorded in Acts 1:8 “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the*

Sixth Sunday of Epiphany – Mission Sunday – February 16, 2020, Year A

earth.” Christianity is not supposed to be some well-kept secret, that we whisper about and share secretly but we are to share it with others,, in thought, word and deed.

Both Marilyn and I are familiar with, and support New Wineskins Missionary Network. I served on its Board of Trustees for several terms, and was blessed to serve as President of that Board for six years. Back in 2015, we had Sharon Steinmiller, the now retired director of New Wineskins, visit St. Andrew’s and introduce many of you to the Missionary Network. She preached from our Lectern and then we had a luncheon for her. She began by speaking nothing but Chinese for ten minutes. It got a little uncomfortable because you had no idea what she was saying. Now you know what it is like when a missionary gets to China, unprepared, and has no idea what people are saying. She shared with us about New Wineskins. I believe in their work, and your Vestry supports New Wineskins monthly as part of our outreach.

New Wineskins Missionary Network is all about helping the local church remember that they are to be taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Remember what Jesus said, “*to the ends of the earth.*” New Wineskins Missionary Network has been doing this for over 45 years. Their calling has been to fill the void that has existed of bringing that to churches on a local level the need for missions. You could call New Wineskins a mission mobilizing organization whose purpose is to mobilize the church for evangelism, discipleship and cross-cultural ministry to the ends of the earth – locally, domestically and internationally.

And then New Wineskins Missionary Network has the Global Missions Conference every three years in Ridgecrest, North Carolina. I have to tell you, it is a remarkable experience of gathering the whole church – we are talking about thousands of people from all over the world, for teaching, worship, Bible study, and just to hear what the Lord is doing throughout the world, and what He is saying to equip the church. It is amazing to gather with Anglicans from all over the world – seeing how God is challenging and equipping people – knowing that first – they have to answer the call. Sitting next to a member of the House of Lords of the British Parliament at lunch, who has been called to fight for women’s rights in the Sudan; sitting next to at dinner the archbishop of Nigeria, it is very humbling. Every three years, people from around the world, gather together – made up of all kinds of Anglicans, including Archbishops, Bishops, priests, deacons, and people with a heart for others – for missions – building relationships with other Anglicans in the U.S. and around the world. I could talk for hours about experiences that I have had, or witnessed at this conference, but I won’t because we have other things to do – including sharing Jesus’ love with one another. The amazing people I have met and grown in relationship with from around the world – from the New Wineskins Missionary Network – this group is about taking the Gospel to the Nations. I am so grateful that our Vestry is supporting this wonderful group on your behalf. Maybe in 2022 we will be able to get a group together to go to the conference and experience this in person. Twice we took 2 buses from St. Bart’s near Buffalo down to Ridgecrest and they are still talking about it. It was amazing – so maybe we can take a van or two.

The Vestry is actively looking at expanding our outreach horizons here at home as well. Jesus called us to be His witnesses not only “*in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria*” but to the

ends of the earth – and that includes the mission fields in Coffee County and beyond. Here in Coffee County and beyond! As I have charged the Vestry to pray about and bring to the meeting opportunities for us to reach out – I ask you to pray about it too, and let us know what God puts on your heart.