

“The Lord of the Harvest”
4th Sunday After Pentecost
July 6, 2025
Apostles Anglican Church, Knoxville, TN

Texts: Isaiah 66:10-16 / Psalm 66 / Galatians 6:1-18 / Luke 10:1-20

THE FIELDS ARE WHITE FOR THE HARVEST, brothers and sisters...

I can still hear the voice of The Rev. Canon Michael Green. He was 72 years old at the time (over 20 years ago now, he died several years ago at the age of 88). He was world-renowned as a theologian and evangelist, and he was an Anglican.... can you believe that! We were in Greensburg, which is a suburb of Pittsburgh. (Now many of you don't know this about me, but I am, at root, an introvert. I love to spend the day reading or while away an afternoon in contemplation all by myself, or spend the day reading, or knee-deep in a mountain stream with a fly rod.)

That far-ago Sunday, Canon Michael had pushed me to the brink. We had just had a long, strenuous weekend, where Michael had put me on a panel in a busy Barnes & Noble, accepting questions from passersby. I had given my personal testimony to a group of people I didn't know in a home of someone I didn't know. I had spent time on a small college campus just randomly engaging young people in conversation in a cafeteria. All at the guidance and behest of Michael Green. He had taken me out of my comfort zone countless times, and I was exhausted. We worshiped in a local Anglican church in the morning, while still others gave their testimony in lieu

of a sermon, and now I just wanted to go back home to Beaver and to my wife, and my sedate seminary life. And, so as I saw Michael approach me at the end of the service, with his indefatigable effervescence, I cringed. As I was packing to go home, he bounded towards me, “Greg, let’s go do some outdoor evangelism! I’ve got this artist who’s going to paint for the children. We’re going to this poor neighborhood, the projects, and we’re going to knock on doors and bring the children out and play games, while he paints, and while we act out the salvation story for the children! Come on, Greg! It’ll be great!” You know, you couldn’t say ‘no’ to Michael Green. And so I was whisked off with him to this poor neighborhood to love the children and tell them about Jesus. And it **was** amazing how the energy came back when we arrived and started to share our faith and to love these poor children. I saw Satan fall like lightning! But, even more importantly, I saw Christ lifted up and glorified.

That expression, “I saw Satan fall like lightning” may not resonate with you. When I was a young boy, my family used to spend summers with my grandparents in Iowa. My grandmother was confined to a wheelchair, but she still washed, cleaned, cooked and generally took care of her small house from that chair. And one of her self-appointed tasks was to help give me a bath. Being a young boy of 6 or 7 years old, the biggest battle for her was just getting me in the tub. After a full day in the summer heat playing barefooted in the fields and fishing along the Des Moines river, I’m sure I was rank. But, still, I did not want to get in that tub. Until she said the

magic words, “Aw c’mon Gregggy, give the devil a black eye..... Wouldn’t you like to give the devil a black eye?!” And, in the tub I’d go! So, if you don’t like the expression “I saw Satan fall light lightning,” then maybe “Give the Devil a blackeye” would suit you as it does me.

I remember this statistic from seminary, that the average Anglican invited somebody to church once every 33 years. Wow! So that means about twice in their adult lifetime, church members could be counted on to invite somebody to church.

THE FIELDS ARE WHITE FOR THE HARVEST, brothers and sisters...

We learn several things about this harvest from Luke’s Gospel. First, we know that the harvest is plentiful. There are many people moving to our neighborhoods even now. I spoke with my next door neighbor, who moved from Illinois about six months ago, and he said that he had another friend who was just now moving down from the north. Knoxville, whether you like it or not, is growing.

All of these people moving to Knoxville are in need of a Savior and Lord and many don’t even know it, but their hearts are ready to receive this knowledge. They just need somebody, anybody, to love them, to walk through life with them. to tell them about Jesus, to invite them to Apostles. Isaiah (52:7) says, “

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,

who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

The people of this church have such beautiful feet! And What an *apropos* verse for Church of the Apostles, situated as we are in the foothills of the mountains.

Secondly, we learn that the first thing we can do about this is PRAY. We need to pray earnestly it says for the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. So, the Lord of the Harvest, Jesus Christ, is in charge of this. But, if we are honest, we need to pray that the Lord sends **us out into the harvest**, not the person sitting next to you, but YOU! Somebody has to be involved in the harvest.... It won't harvest itself.

THE FIELDS ARE WHITE FOR THE HARVEST, brothers and sisters...

And how do we prepare for this gleaning of the harvest?

First notice that we are not in charge of the production, we are not in charge of what comes of the harvest. We are only supposed to be there to glean at the harvest. Second, we are not responsible for the response of those we talk to, for the “success” of the venture. We are merely to be obedient. Third, If things don't go well, we are not supposed to sit around sucking our thumb and wondering why. We are to “shake the dust off” from that encounter and move on! Fourthly, regardless of the response of those we meet and speak with, we are to bless them with God's kingdom drawing

near (v. 9). Remember that Jesus breathed peace on His disciples and we need to do the same.

Well, what might this look like for us at Apostles? Well it starts with love and being a good neighbor. Showing them the community of God's people and how they rally around one another. I've seen that often here at Apostles and my own family has been on the receiving end of your love and care.

THE FIELDS ARE WHITE FOR THE HARVEST, brothers and sisters...

So, finally, we learn that we need to do SOMETHING. St. James has said that faith without works is dead. Jesus told the seventy-two, "**Go your way....**" In other words, do whatever He has called you to do, go to wherever and whomever He has put on your heart. John Piper has said, "Go, send, or disobey." You see those are our only choices. Jesus doesn't give us any other! We need to commit ourselves and this church to Go or Send, because we are not about to disobey. We must all either be goers or senders. We can't do everything in our community, but we can surely do something, listen to God's call to us and then act.

Church of the Apostles is already involved in the harvest in many ways.

Cedarbrook Outreach serves at-risk children and families through mentoring students, summer programs, mobile food pantries, and a furniture ministry. The mobile food pantry at **Madison Place** is a weekly ministry answering the call to love our neighbors. Each week, apostles of

this Church show up in a neighborhood of 250 trailer homes, one mile away from Apostles, a community that is mostly Hispanic. We set up donated food so our neighbors can “shop” along the line for what they wish to carry them through to next week. Our team has built relationships over the past 3 years by being present in this community. In a few weeks we will be filling backpacks with school supplies for the children of Madison Place. **Hope Resource Center** is a cost-free healthcare center for women to equip them to make informed and healthy reproductive decisions. **The Restoration House** works to help restore single mothers and their children back to God’s good intent for their lives through transformational housing, team mentoring, and family advocacy. **Tools for Hope** supports Rwandan subsistence farmers through training and support so they can transition to more stable, healthy, and dignified lives. Recently, Apostles has begun a relationship with another **Anglican diocese in Chile** which allows for mutual support in ministry. Many of you are engaged in these efforts. But, for those of you who are not, and as an encouragement to those who are, we have this passage from Luke’s Gospel today. It is a reminder to all of us that “Our God of Grace often gives us a second chance, but there is no second chance to harvest a ripe crop.” My farmer grandfather taught me that.

And, let me be clear, the fields at Madison Place, in East TN, in Chile, are also ripe for the harvest...the Kingdom of God is at hand...it is now!

And we must learn to be satisfied with the work God has given us to do and with the resources we already have, in our homes and here at Apostles

Anglican. The world tells us, even in the church, what success looks like: a larger house or car, a more vibrant and relevant ministry, larger church buildings, but that is not success to God.

You know the secret to success? It's right here in the whole of Scripture, again and again. Can I tell you this secret? Success in God's Kingdom is OBEDIENCE to His call. That's it.... Obedience.

So let us not be distracted with numbers and appearances. As someone has said, "The mark of a great church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity." And in that going and sending, we need to commit to being a source of healing for our community, as it says so clearly in St. John's gospel (verse 9).

THE FIELDS ARE WHITE FOR THE HARVEST, brothers and sisters...

We must realize once and for all, that this time is NOW (v. 9, 11). In John's Gospel, Jesus says something similar to our passage from Luke. In John 4:34-38,

³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵ **Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.** ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Jesus says, stop saying that the time is not right, that we have time, that at some future date we will do this. Always looking to the future...its coming...NO! IT IS HERE! I know this goes against the philosophy of every Treasurer I've ever worked with in churches, but I am increasingly uncomfortable with putting money aside for a rainy day or for the future. I think, in God's economy, as you set aside these resources for later, so you postpone the blessing that God offers for us and for this community. And who's to say that a massive influx of people into our community is not the rainy day we have prepared for. Missionary William Borden has said, "No reserves. No retreats. No regrets."

Jesus says clearly...he said it 2000 years ago and he says it now to us, to all who will listen and obey, "Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest." And then he goes on to say that there are some who are already putting up treasures in heaven, already rejoicing with those who prepared the fields by sowing so that we can reap...all of the faithful who have gone before us.

THE FIELDS ARE WHITE FOR HARVEST, brothers and sisters.

Last Sunday, Fr. Jack gave a rousing sermon on the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul about what an apostle means in the context of John's Gospel, chapter 21, and specifically Jesus' charge to St. Peter. I would like to expand on that, If I may and go to the basics of what an apostle truly is.

It is very interesting to me that, to my knowledge, there are no churches named, Church of the Holy Members, or Church of the Holy Pewsitters, or

even Church of the Disciples. Why is that, you might ask. Church of the Disciples wouldn't be so bad. A disciple comes from the Greek word, ***discipulus***, which means pupil or learner. It is good to be a pupil or learner. But, you know, if you're going to grow up, eventually you have to graduate from mere "pupil" to somebody who acts on what they know. The disciple must eventually become the worker, or even the teacher. So, our forefathers and foremothers chose the title, Church of the Apostles. I wasn't involved in the discussions for choosing that name, but I'd like to think that they completely understood the importance, the gravity of that word, **apostles**. So, what does that word, Apostle, actually mean?

Well it comes from a Greek word, ***apostolos***, which means emissary or more exactly "one who is sent **off** or **out**." So, again, using English, we are the "Church of the Ones Who are Sent Away." Interesting isn't it. Many years ago I heard it said that the founding DNA, the founding naming of any church was crucial to its history and its future. Even hundreds of years later, you could trace the history of a church through its founding DNA. Well, our founding DNA is the Church of the Ones Who are Sent Away."

So, now the kicker: What are we going to do about this? How many of you believe that this Gospel is true? How many of you believe that this Gospel is for you? Well, the first step in obedience is prayer. And I don't know about you, but the difficult things that Christ asks me to do must often start with Him changing my desires. So, I want to pray this prayer for us and our community.

Prayers for Our Community

Lord, we pray for our eyes to be opened to see the strangers in our community as our neighbors, and for our hearts to be opened so that we might willingly commit to inconveniencing ourselves to meet their needs so that they might enter the new life only You can provide; that we might be obedient to Your Great Commandment.

Lord, we pray for the many people in our area who do not know You as Savior; and we pray, too, for ourselves that we would be convicted by Your Word to commit ourselves -- all that we are and all that we have -- to reaching them with the Good News of Your grace and forgiveness; that we might be obedient to Your Great Commission. Amen.

Brothers and sisters, if we truly desire to do God's will and are indeed obedient to His call, we have a promise from the lips of Jesus Himself in our passage from Luke. Hear these words and be encouraged...and emboldened,

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" ¹⁸ And he said to them, ***"Give the devil a black eye! (okay, that's a paraphrase)"*** ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

THE FIELDS ARE WHITE FOR THE HARVEST...NOW! brothers and sisters... NOW! Let us arise and GO! In the power and strength of The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... AMEN!