
The Yet Man

A sermon by the Rev. Canon Julia Mitchener
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 9, Year C

The harvest is plentiful. The harvest is plentiful, and The kingdom of God has come near. You know, I'm tempted just to end this sermon right now; these words feel like enough. Me being me, of course, I actually do have a few more things to say! But if you leave church this morning with nothing else, let it be with this reassurance: *The harvest is plentiful.* There is enough. There is enough, and then some. Our good and gracious God's deepest longing for all of us is a life where no one is in want, where no one's stomach, or heart, is empty. A life that is a feast—a feast of love, joy, and peace. *The harvest is plentiful . . . and The kingdom of God has come near.* God's kingdom—that time and place beyond all time and place, where death shall be no more and sorrow and sighing will flee away—God's kingdom is closer to us than our often trembling and terrorized hearts can ever imagine. Even now, it is breaking in, in bits and pieces; even now, it is breaking in on our troubled and tragedy ridden world. These words are true and worthy of full acceptance.

Of course, they fly in the face of so much that is happening all around us. Many things don't seem very plentiful these days—things like love and peace and kindness and compassion and hope and trust and respect for the dignity of every human being. Things like food and shelter and adequate healthcare and education and leaders that prioritize human need rather than human greed.

It was not so different in Jesus' day. Poverty was widespread in first century Palestine and heavy and unethical taxation the norm. Frequent droughts led to grain shortages and famine. Roman occupation brought about resentment and provoked periods of social unrest. Bandits and robbers took advantage of the upheaval and made travel especially dangerous. No wonder Jesus tells his disciples that he's sending them out as lambs in the midst of wolves!

It was a precarious time, and so you can see why so many of the responses people give to Jesus throughout the gospels when he says things like *The Kingdom of God has come near* or *The harvest is plentiful* or *Do not worry about your life* or *Do not be afraid, little flock*, —you can see why so many people's responses to Jesus' words of assurance are words of doubt, even outright disbelief.

You may recall a certain story where there's a crowd gathered around Jesus out in the boonies at suppertime and he just keeps on preaching and preaching and preaching. Everyone's hungry, toddlers are shrieking, couples who have been married 35 years are having their usual spats (*Boaz, I told you to throw some extra protein bars in your backpack. But no, you never listen!*). In the midst of this mayhem, Jesus tells his disciples to go around and ask if anyone has any food. One boy does, so the disciples bring his five fish and two loaves of bread to Jesus, to which someone replies, "What are they among so many?"

What are they among so many? This question of abject despair that surely all of us have uttered in one form or another at some point in our lives; this expression of fear and panic and heartbreak and dread—this question provides the emotional backdrop to this morning's gospel reading. None of the disciples gives voice to it here, but whispers of it—and of others like it (*The child is dead, why bother the teacher any further? Lord, can you not see that we are perishing?*)—whispers of it hang thick in the air.

No wonder, then, that as Jesus commissions his newest disciples, he gives them a plan for when things go south. After instructing them on how to go about their mission, proclaiming the Good News of God's love and salvation—after instructing them on how to go about their mission, he tells his new followers what to do when times are tough, when they, and their ministry, are rejected, when their hearts are troubled, when they find themselves in danger, when the future is unsure. "Whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you," Jesus counsels, "Go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off

in protest against you.” But then comes the critical part, the really remarkable part: “Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.”

Yet know this. I have to say—and bear with me here for just a minute—I have to say that the word “yet” is one of my favorite words in the entire New Testament. You’ve heard about Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, right? Well, Jesus is also the Man of “Yets.” That’s right, you heard it here first: Jesus is a “Yet Man.” Not a Yes Man, but a Yet Man. Jesus is a Yet Man, one who is always reminding us that no matter how desperate things become, with God, there is always another possibility, one we ourselves could never have imagined, one we could never have dreamed. But that’s all right—that’s all right, because God dreamed it for us.

Which is great Good News! It is great Good News for us in this time of trial and tribulation, of pain and discord and loss, both individual and collective—it is great Good News for this time of trial through which we are living. Because Jesus’ assurance in this morning’s gospel is that none of the harrowing circumstances—none of the pain, the loss, the fear, the rejection, the oppression, the terrors or the terrorism—none of the harrowing circumstances in which we may find ourselves can ever alter Jesus’ promise to us and to the whole creation: *The kingdom of God has come near.* Our belief, or disbelief, in this proclamation, our acceptance, or rejection of it—or other people’s acceptance or rejection of it—does not make it any more or less true. The kingdom of God has come near. Full stop. No strings attached. The kingdom of God has come near, and it is bearing a harvest of love, comfort, peace, forgiveness, redemption, release, and hope. Even, and especially, in those places and in those times where we least expect it, the harvest is bearing fruit. In ways we may not yet see, in ways we might never imagine, but the harvest is bearing fruit. God’s kingdom is coming close to us, closer to us even than we are to ourselves.

And God’s kingdom cannot be vanquished! God’s love cannot be vanquished. God’s victory over sin and death, God’s ultimate triumph over the powers and principalities, over all the forces of darkness—God’s triumph cannot be vanquished. The kingdom of God has come near, and it is here to stay.

Friends, like Jesus’ earliest disciples, you and I are called to bear witness to all of this in a world that yearns desperately to hear some word of hope. We are called to be people who, “even at the grave make our song, ‘Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.’” We are called to be people who, like the apostle Paul, can say in our time of trial, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

So take heart. Take heart, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Take heart in these challenging times. Let us lean on one another, and, above all, let us lean on God, who, in the words of a wonderful old gospel song, has never failed us yet. Amen.