

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge  
Sermon-Matthew 9:35-10:15  
Sunday, June 18, 2017

### The Laborers are few

1. It is Father's Day, so I am going to confess one of the best parts of being a dad. I love sitting on the couch and calling one of my kids, who diligently come running to see what I need. Then I ask them to let the dog out (three feet away from where I am sitting) or to refill my drink. Without fail, they fulfill my request without complaint.
2. If I were dishonest, or a politician- sorry for the redundancy- I would tell you that I was always just as good of a son. I think I would do simple tasks like letting the dogs out, but often we had more significant tasks than that. Getting us to do them was worse than pulling teeth for my parents.
  - a. "Mike, go shovel the sidewalk." "Eh, it will melt in a few months."
3. I remember one summer my dad told me that I was painting the chain link fence in the backyard. This was not a small job. We had a lot of fence. And he didn't ask me to do it. He came home with a can of silver paint and some brushes and told me I was doing it. Of course, my answer was that I wasn't going to do it. About ten minutes later, I was outside doing it.
4. I often joke with Bonnie that the reason I want so many children is because, the more we have, the more likely we are to get one of them to do what we want. I now understand why people in the past, particularly in heavily agrarian cultures, had lots of kids. The more kids, the more workers.
5. The laborers are few. So, have some kids and raise them to be laborers too.
6. I think this reflects how we have done church for generations too. In Mathew 9:37-38, Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."
7. There is so much in those verses. Looking at the previous verses, it talks about Jesus teaching throughout Israel and having compassion on the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. This reminds me very much of our own day. We look around and see what young people are doing. We see this new sexual identity revolution. We see a generation that are remaining youth well into their twenties, and even thirties.
  - a. The world around us seems to be collapsing and falling away from biblical principles. Our response is often frustration or disgust. Perhaps it needs to be compassion. What we see is a world of lost people, flailing around at life because they are sheep without a shepherd.
8. Jesus thus says to pray to the Lord of the harvest because the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Probably a month ago I talked about how we need to be ready to be the answer to prayer. In other words, people pray, then God often uses people to be the means by which he answers those prayers. When Jesus says to pray to the Lord of the harvest for laborers, I don't think we should expect that God will send *other* people out into the harvest. We should pray with the expectation that we will be sent out.
  - a. Perhaps another way to phrase Jesus' words would be, "Pray to the Lord of the harvest that you will be enabled and empowered to go out into the harvest."

9. For generations in the church the means by which we worked the harvest- if we did at all- was by “harvesting” in our own families. We raised our kids in the church, taught them some basics, put them in Sunday school, and it kind of worked.
10. I think that is also why we are in the situation we are in right now- where so many young people are out of the church, as well as an increasing number of older people. And there is a hostility towards the church. Our focus must be so much broader than that. I will come back to this in a moment.

### If not us, then whom?

1. First, let me ask this question, “If not us, then whom?” We can pray for workers to go into the harvest; but if we are followers of Christ, then we have to recognize that we are the ones called into the harvest. Is God going to send the friendly neighborhood atheist into his harvest? No, just like my dad didn’t tell the neighbor kid that *he* was going to paint our fence. It is our job as God’s people, and it is because of the people out there with other ideas, worldviews, and agendas that we need to be willing to go out into the harvest.
2. I know it sounds daunting, but that is where there is more great comfort in these verses. Jesus tells us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into *his* harvest. *We* may be laborers, but we aren’t responsible for the harvest. It isn’t our harvest, and it isn’t our power that brings the harvest. We are doing work for God, with God, but the work *is* God’s. This means that there is nothing to be afraid of. There is no chance at failure. You aren’t responsible for the spreading of the kingdom. You are only responsible to being faithful to serve God who does his work through people like you and me.
3. That should take so much stress out of the whole situation. Also, think about how amazing it is that the Lord of the harvest invites us into the work of his harvest. He can do it on his own, but he chooses to work with and through us. This shows how much God values us. We aren’t just spirits to be drawn back to him and put on a shelf. We have been called to good works in Christ from the foundations of the world. We are made in God’s image and are therefore called to share in his work. How beautifully amazing that is.

### Dads- we must be spiritual fathers to our world

1. Since it is Father’s Day, let me give this last little piece of encouragement to all the men out there. If we are sons of God and brothers of Christ, then we need to recognize the importance of being spiritual fathers to our world. That kid with the lip ring and pants sagging half off is rear end that serves you coffee; it is so easy to disparage him. Have you thought of spiritually adopting him? If we want to see change, we have to be prepared to let God use us to bring it.
2. Sadly, many parents aren’t raising their own kids in the ways of the Lord, which gives us a mighty opportunity to become spiritual fathers to so many out there. We all know how vital a father is to a family, so of course our roles as fathers in the family of God are just as vital.