

“Bringing in the Sheaves”

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

October 22, 2017

Consecration Sunday

Plymouth Congregational Church, UCC

The Rev. Jane Anne Ferguson

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

6 The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

9 As it is written, "God scatters abroad, God gives to the poor; God's righteousness endures forever."

10 God who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; 12 for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. 13 Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that God has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for God's indescribable gift!

My dad once walked into my kitchen and said “This is just like your grandmother’s!” What he meant was the number of plants and bits of plants I have in my kitchen window. And its true. We have a greenhouse window above the kitchen sink and it is full. Of pots of herbs. A few flowers I nurture through the winter. The last of the tomatoes ripening. And yes at least a couple of odd-shaped bottles of plants sprouting roots in water. It is reminiscent of Grandmother Ferguson’s kitchen window sills in the old farmhouse in Oklahoma.

I loved Grandma Ferguson’s house. Not fancy at all, comfortable, old pictures on the walls, the smell of the earth and the smell of iron from the well water. Her Oklahoma red dirt garden out back was complete with terrapins, as she called them, box turtles. We would paint their shells with finger nail polish to identify them the next time we came. There were chickens, goats, cows, sometimes puppies...

I’m guessing I first heard the old hymn that gives us the sermon title this morning sitting in with her in the sanctuary of the First Baptist Church of Harrah, OK. I even remember the old sanctuary where my dad and all his siblings grew up wiggling in the pews beside her. “Bringing in the Sheaves” was written in 1874 by [Knowles Shaw](#), who was inspired by [Psalm 126:6](#), "He that goeth forth and

weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve;
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

Refrain:

Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves,
Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

What have you harvested recently in your life? Let's think literally first. Vegetables, flowers from a raised bed or container garden? How many have actually harvested wheat or hay or soybeans or corn or some other large crop?

Now let's think figuratively... in metaphor. **What have you harvested in your life?** What are some seeds you have planted in relationships, family, school, career, a hobby, sport, a craft that have resulted in a satisfying, abundant harvest?.....for instance just over 25 years ago I decided to study storytelling, to start learning and telling stories...I took classes and went to workshops and spent hours in the library looking up old books of tales (this was before the internet made it easier to find all kinds of stories from different cultures and traditions)....I spent hours crafting a story, writing it down at the beginning,.... making storyboards of the scenes....rehearsing and rehearsing....I would get very nervous before telling. The harvest of all those hours of study and research is abundance. More than I ever imagined. I still work at my storytelling, I still tend it like we have to tend a garden day by day, week by week, year by year,but now I learn stories with an ease that surprises me. I have a style of telling that has developed over the years that surprises me. And telling stories is second nature to me. I feel fully who I am and a closeness to God I never imagined when I tell stories...that's not why I set out to tell stories...its the harvest of all the years of tending the practice of storytelling. What about you?

What have you harvested in your life with the perseverance and love and the help of God that surprised you? The beauty of life is that we never have to stop planting seeds of change and growth and harvesting their results.

Growing a church can be like growing a garden, well maybe more like tending an entire farm! Each church is started in its earliest years with a handful of folks, the first seeds....and they begin to grow community and ministry as they worship together, study together, care for one another, laugh and cry together. They sow seeds of God's love and justice, reaping the harvest through times of joy and sorrow.

The apostle Paul was tending the garden of the church in Corinth when he gave them the words of encouragement that you just heard our liturgist read. To paraphrase Paul, "You reap as you sow, abundantly or sparingly, God supplies the abundance that empowers your generosity and sharing...Out of God's abundance of

blessing our ministries, our community, in the name of Christ grows....Thanks be to God for God's indescribable gift....of love in Christ Jesus and so much abundance that we must share!"

So what about the harvest of our lives together here at Plymouth? The harvest of our pledges, our tithes and offerings, that make up our yearly operating budget? The harvest of our work together to make God's realm of justice and love visible?

We give faithfully year after year and there are many things we see grow, but we may miss the abundant and amazing scope of the harvest. We have a harvest of ministries that is so abundant that people can glean from our fields. In Hebrew scriptures we hear of God's mandate about gleaning to God's people. They are to always leave enough in their fields at harvest time so that the poor, the widows and the orphans, those on the margins of society could come and glean from the fields. They could harvest from the fields they had could not plant or tend because of their particular vulnerability, to feed for their themselves and their families.

People glean from the fields of Plymouth through our generous giving of financial resources. Our pledges support a growing operating budget. We give above and beyond that to disaster relief, to Neighbors in Need for UCC ministries around our country, to the Christmas Fund to enhance support for retired UCC ministers. We have a beautiful building to share with the Fort Collins community. We have active vital staff that not only tend Plymouth's garden but reach out to connect us with the wider church and to be leaders in social change. Our youth are involved each summer and throughout the school year in mission and service trips....this summer our abundance spilled over into the Red Bud Reservation of South Dakota....and there are several Front Range Youth Events planned so they can continue service closer to home. The Immigration Team is very visible right now and growing in its ministry. Think of our giving to Bennett School, through the Alternative Giving Fair, the Giving Tree at Christmas, Faith Family Hospitality.....these just name a few ways in which people glean from our generous and abundant field.

And they glean from our spiritual engagement in this community. We come to worship, we meet for study and spiritual growth, for fellowship and to care for one another, to volunteer, in very tangible ways. This spiritual and physical energy spills out into the wider community of Fort Collins and northern CO. as we take the spirit of God that we encounter together in worship to our places of work, our schools, our neighbors. The abundance of Plymouth's fields of ministry overflow.

In the midst of abundance we know that ministries, like plants, need constant tending, watering, feeding, warmth and light to grow. They may be new growth or they may be in the midst of change. There are times when ministries need tending with extra care. Like the Japanese eggplant I still have growing on our patio. I bought it on sale late in the season. It's almost dried out with too little water, its almost drowned with the rains we had. In fact I had to repot it once because the soil was too wet. I bring it in when it threatens to freeze outside...and after losing blossoms, almost dying...it now has blossoms and four little eggplants growing. There are times when ministries need pruning in order to grow - like my bougainvillea vine...When it looks like its at death's door, I trim it back and

give it a little plan food and it grows more leaves....it blooms pink at Christmas and magenta all summer. Then drops its leaves and we start again. Ministries in churches are like that.

What needs tending at Plymouth? Our Christian Formation programs need consistent tending children and youth with new volunteers, teachers bring creative and imaginative faith. Our evening service needs consistent tending so it is not a ghettoized or isolated group within Plymouth but a vital, connected part of Plymouth's wide abundant fields. Our Calling and Caring program of lay visitation needs care as it expands to serve a larger church. Our outreach to college students in our community, starting with our immediate neighbors at CSU and reaching out in time across town to Front Range needs a great deal of tending as a new ministry of our community. Developing lay leadership skills and volunteer recruitment and management needs very consistent tending. development and involvement from a wider segment of our members. Progressive evangelism....making ourselves visible for the sake of expanding and making visible the realm of God in northern Colorado needs meticulous care. Understanding what it means to offer extravagant welcome must be tended each time we open our doors....we will never finish tending our welcome. We will never finish tending our vital faith for God keeps giving abundantly so that we can share abundantly.

The old song continues....

Sowing in the sunshine, sowing in the shadows,
Fearing neither clouds nor winter's chilling breeze;
By and by the harvest, and the labor ended,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

We know the labor never really ends....it just changes with the seasons, with new growth, with the extravagant giving of God. Thanks be to God for God's indescribable gifts to us as today we bring in the sheaves of God's abundance and grace. Amen!

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