**OPEN YOUR EYES AND LOOK AT THE FIELDS!**

October 23, 2016

John 4:27-42

Key Verse 4:35 “Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”

Have you seen a ripe harvest field? Many of you grew up in a city and have never seen the nature’s wonder of harvest, how a tiny kernel of wheat is planted, and grows for harvest. May was a harvest season for barley, and June was a season for wheat harvest. In Korea, September was a harvest season for rice. Sowing and harvesting were very familiar to the disciples. But there was a harvest they did not know. It was harvesting a crop for eternal life. Today Jesus teaches us harvesting crops for eternal life. In order to participate in the spiritual harvest, there is one thing we need to do. It is to open our eyes and look at the ripe harvest fields. I pray that God may open your eyes and see the ripe harvest fields so that you may be able to participate in the spiritual harvest.

In the previous passage Jesus offered a thirsty Samaritan woman the living water welling up to eternal life. She admitted how she was waiting for the Messiah, who would explain everything. Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you - I am he.” That is where Jesus’ conversation with her ended, for then she left her water jar and dashed back into the town. It was the end of this short exchange with Jesus, but the beginning of a new life for her. To fill her jar and take it home was no longer urgent. The urgent matter was to tell others about this man at the well. With excitement, she went to her townspeople exclaiming, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” So the people came out of the town and made their way toward Jesus. She was not afraid to talk about her past life. What must have surprised them the most was her openness, joy and freedom. She was no longer the guarded, defensive and rude woman they had known. They saw a profound change in her. It was as if she had been born again. One person’s testimony can have a powerful influence on a family, a campus, a work place, even a whole town. When Jou May and Jun Zhang came to our ministry in 2009, they brought many Malaysian friends including Calvin, Jake, Edmond and others. We had a fruitful ministry for the next 4 years. The village of Sychar was powerfully impacted and influenced when one woman drank the living water from Jesus Christ. One to one Bible study looks small and ineffective compared with mass evangelism. But we must never despise or underestimate the power and influence of one person who has been changed by the grace of Jesus Christ. We see this through this Samaritan woman. We see it also through the Gerasene demoniac who impacted ten towns (Mk 5:20).

As the woman ran into town, Jesus and his disciples had a conversation about food. The disciples urged Jesus saying, “Rabbi, eat something.” But Jesus said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” The disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food? Maybe that woman?” In John’s gospel people often take Jesus’ words too literally, missing the spiritual meaning behind them. Like Nicodemus not understanding being born again, and like the Samaritan woman not understanding the living water, Jesus’ disciples did not understand Jesus’ food. Look at verse 34. “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” What was God’s will? John 6:40 says, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” God’s will was to give the living water to the Samaritan woman who was thirsty. God’s will was to give eternal life to those who came to Jesus because of the Samaritan woman’s testimony. God’s will is to save all those who believe in Jesus. Doing God’s will was Jesus’ food.

As we know, food is one of the joys and necessities of life. Food gives us nourishment, satisfaction, strength, energy and power. Perhaps those of you who came without breakfast are not listening to my message, but thinking about delicious lunch afterward. But Jesus is teaching us that doing God’s will is also food. We need not only physical food, but also spiritual food. For Jesus, his joy and strength came from doing God’s will and work. Jesus’ talk with this thirsty, open-hearted Samaritan woman gave him joy and new strength more than any steak dinner could. Many of us also can testify that before having Bible study with our Bible student, we were hungry and tired, maybe irritable. But after finishing the Bible study we were filled with a mysterious and inexpressible joy.

Look at verse 35. “Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” Jesus and his disciples were standing near a wheat field at the time. It was unripe green fields. But Jesus looked at Samaritans who heard the woman’s testimony and were coming out of the town toward him. They were wearing white robes. When Jesus saw them, he saw a harvest that was white and ready to be reaped. “It’s still four months until harvest” was a common idiom at that time, meaning, “You don’t need to rush.” You cannot harvest immediately after sowing. You need to wait at least four months. So looking for fruit immediately after sowing is rushing. Perhaps the disciples were thinking like this, when they entered the Samaritan village: Who among Samaritans will listen to our message? They will never accept the gospel. Let’s just buy food and go.” They thought that Samaria is a place where you cannot expect harvest now. Maybe later after much preparation. It was their prejudice and fixed idea. Jesus challenged those thinking, saying, “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” Jesus said, “Look! See! The harvest is right now!” Ever since Jesus came, it has been harvest time on earth. It is harvest time until Jesus comes again. It is harvest time as long as we have life and breath to work. So what are we waiting for? “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”

It was prophesied in the Old Testament that when the Messiah comes, there will be no gap between the sowing and harvesting. Amos 9:13 says, “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.” Sowing and reaping will go together. Jesus is showing his disciples and us, that these are the beginning of those days. Jesus brought the messianic age. It has begun. Jesus says in verse 36 that he is already reaping fruit for eternal life (with no natural gap of months) “that sower and reaper may rejoice together.” What he is doing here is collapsing sowing and reaping into one event which Amos saw with his eyes of faith. Jesus is both sower and reaper at the same time. Jesus is saying, “In the Messianic age, don’t be locked into fixed natural laws. Don’t say, ‘Four months, then the harvest’ because that is the way it has always been. Instead open your eyes. Lift up your eyes. Look. See what God is doing. Look on the world with the eyes of Jesus. There are people and peoples reaching harvest time all around us and all around the world. Don’t be fatalistic or mechanistic. Open your eyes and see that God is readying harvest all the time. Not just after four months.

How then can we open our eyes and have a right perspective or viewpoint? This requires faith and a right attitude. It requires believing Jesus’ words. Jesus wants us to have vision for the world, that the world is ripe for harvest. We are sometimes blinded by our own unbelief or laziness or complaints. It is easy to look at the world and see darkness. Jesus wants us to look with hope and faith, and see God’s purpose and believe his promises. Time and again we need to pray that God may open our eyes to see the harvest. There is a story of two shoe salesmen who went to Africa. One came back and said, “The market is terrible - no one wears shoes!” But the other said, “The market is great - everyone needs shoes!” They saw the same thing, but they had very different perspectives. How do we see the world, our campus, our work place, our own family? Do we see these as dark and hopeless, and complain, and give up before trying to do anything, with many excuses? Or do we see the world with faith in God, knowing what God wants to do and what God can do? Do we have the conviction: “For no word from God will ever fail” (Lk 1:37) and, “Everything is possible for one who believes” (Mk 9:23).

Many say that Canada is too corrupt morally and spiritually and that her environment is not good for a spiritual harvest. They say that we should wait until people are fully ready to accept God’s message. Also others say that they will bear much fruit when the harvest time comes. They say that they cannot bear fruit now, because the season of Christ has not yet come. What all these people say is: “Four months more, and then the harvest.” But Jesus declares, “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” In Jesus’ eyes, it is the golden harvest time, when so many people are fully ready to accept God’s grace. In Canada, now is the time for a great spiritual revival! People are waiving their hands calling for harvest workers. They say that college students are focused on building their career that they are not interested in spiritual things; they also say that college students are party animals that we have to wait until they are sick and tired of sinful life. Indeed, there are always people who say, “Four months more and then the harvest.” But Jesus says, “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” They have already hit the rock bottom; they are already sick and tired of their sinful life; they already know that life is so meaningless and empty; they are already looking for true meaning and purpose of their life. They are ripe for harvest.

Jesus had much more to say about sowing and reaping and the harvest. Look at verses 36-38. “Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.” Sowing may be like preaching the word of God where hearts are hard and not much seems to happen. Reaping is done when souls receive eternal life with great joy. They need each other to yield the produce. However, sowing is hard and tedious and not much fun. Reaping the harvest - collecting the fruit of labor, is much more fun and fulfilling. But both share equally in the joy of the harvest. Jesus said, “the sower and the reaper may be glad together.” Jesus might have had in mind the Old Testament prophets who had labored in Samaria, sometimes called Northern Israel. For example, 1 Kings 13 tells of a nameless prophet who delivered God’s message of the coming king Josiah, who would carry out God’s judgment on their idolatry. However, that prophet was deceived by an older prophet and died. His ministry seemed to be in vain. Yet the word of the Lord through him was true. Like him, many nameless prophets had labored in Israel without seeing any fruits. John the Baptist and his disciples had also preached the message of repentance. Now there was a tremendous spiritual harvest. Jesus remembered the sowers who had gone before him. He credited their ministries as essential to the fruitful harvest. Perhaps Jesus saw Elijah and Elisha dancing around in the kingdom of God.

Sometimes we will sow seed: planting without seeing any visible fruit. Other times we will harvest what others have sown: guiding a person into life as a disciple of Jesus. I have shared God’s word with hundreds of people for past 28 years. The discouraging fact is that except for a very few I don’t know if any of them are following Jesus now. It is easy to get discouraged when I don’t see any visible results. Galatians 6:9 has often encouraged me: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” It is not for me to produce fruit, except the fruit of repentance and praise. It is for me to participate humbly and thankfully in God’s harvest with Jesus and his harvest workers.

Verses 39-42 conclude this story in Sychar, Samaria. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.” After hearing Jesus for themselves, their basis for belief went from second-hand knowledge to a first-hand encounter with Jesus. They no longer believed based on someone else’s testimony. They heard Jesus for themselves and came to know that Jesus really is the Savior of the world. It is not enough to believe in Jesus based on someone else’s testimony. We must each have a personal encounter with Jesus through his word.

When harvest time comes, one must put everything else aside and work for the harvest, day and night. If he misses the harvest season, his entire crop can be wasted. But if he works hard at the harvest time, he will be most fruitful. Jesus says, “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” Each campus is like a harvest field. There are young souls waiting for the living word of God to come to them. May God help us open our eyes and see them.