

“The Lord of the Harvest”

Mark 4:26-29

First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest

November 8, 2020

My dear congregation, we've been through quite a week together as our nation has gone through yet another presidential election—this one in the face of a worsening pandemic where millions of our fellow Americans have exercised their right to vote by mail. It has taken over four days to declare a winner. Over 144M votes have been counted—an electoral participation of such magnitude as to break every record in the history of our nation for both Democratic and Republican parties alike. 144 million...yet only 4 million votes differentiated the outcome: a 3% margin which makes abundantly clear the entrenched political divisions which continue to impact this nation and which deplete so much of our energy and emotions.

For many, yesterday was a day of celebration. And for nearly just as many, yesterday was a day to grieve the loss of their chosen candidate. As Allen Hilton asked in his devotional yesterday: “After an appropriate time of celebrating on one side and grieving on the other, will we do the work to build a shared future? Or will this election just flip the keys to the Oval Office to the other half of the population?”

His question is a fair one, but one that cannot be answered apart from our faith.

Back in 1796, our nation's first President reached the same conclusion. In his Farewell Address, George Washington said,

“I have already intimated to you the danger of parties in the State...and the baneful effect of party generally...(but) of all the dispositions which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports...national morality cannot prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”

Washington's vision was prophetic.

The separation of Church and State was never intended to exclude the content of our faith from the practice of our politics. Believers have always known that without faith in God and in one another, the world's longest democracy cannot long endure. As Abraham Lincoln said in his Second Inaugural Address of 1864, in the very darkest days of our national divisions,

“Neither party expected for the war the magnitude which it has attained...Each looked for an easier triumph. (Yet) both read the same Bible, and (both) pray to the same God.”

Lincoln's wisdom was inspired.

It required humility to really believe that. And humility will be the only means now to find a path forward with a government of, by and for all the people. May God give us the grace to make it so.

II

Our text for today takes us to a humbler time, when Jesus of Nazareth preached God's Kingdom beside the Sea of Galilee to the poor and the powerless.

“The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk and then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear.”

I've been watching with joy, as I do each autumn, the corn being taken in here in the Upper Midwest. Long plumes of corn dust rise above the combines as jets of pure, golden grain fill truck after truck after truck with the fruits of the harvest. It's always a glad time for me, and I find myself humming the old hymn “Come Ye Thankful People, Come” to myself as I ride by in my car, looking forward to Thanksgiving Day. And the best part of it is, it's not us who bring s forth

the blessings—it's our loving and faithful God. Our part is to scatter the seeds we've been given—and bring in the harvest that ensues.

Over the past 8 months, this congregation has brought forth a harvest of great generosity in response to the coronavirus. You have gone above and beyond your pledged commitments for the love of neighbor in the cause of Christ. You have fed the hungry, sheltered the homeless and supported the weak. You have invested in creating opportunities for education and independence for “the least of these” our brothers and sisters, and you have not forgotten the suffering in Africa or in the Middle East.

Over half a million dollars this year has been directed to mission beyond our doors—a record offering in the face of this pandemic! I want to thank you for your generosity and for the leadership of Stew Kerr and our faithful Mission Committee, without whom this could not have happened.

Our stewardship theme is “For Such a Time as This”—chosen in light of the coronavirus which has impacted every part of our lives. As we move through this Election and into another year, we already know that the need will be greater. And the work of our church must be greater, too. As we struggle with isolation and loneliness, our church needs to function more like a family: offering encouragement, love and support. As vulnerabilities increase among and beyond our fellowship, Christ is counting on us to respond.

St. Paul said, “As you sow, so shall you harvest.” We must scatter seeds of kindness, mercy and charity, my friends, for which we will be greatly blessed. The Lord of the Harvest has put the seed-corn in our hands. We've been blessed to be a blessing—to bring forth a harvest of righteousness that reveals the face of Christ and the best qualities of a generous people.

If you haven't already, this week you will receive a brochure that tells the story of what First Pres. has given and done in our shared mission commitments. Next Sunday, November 15th, we ask that you commit once again to the life and mission of our church by opening your hand and your heart with your pledged support, trusting in God's providence and in the message of abundance which lies at the heart of the Gospel.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt said in his Inaugural Address back in 1933, when America was facing its greatest economic crisis, “The only thing we have to fear...is fear itself.”

Roosevelt's bravery was powered by faith.

“For such a time as this,” indeed. Whether we speak to the hope of our nation or the work of the Kingdom, we already know where the power and glory rests. It does not rest in us. God will bring forth the harvest: blessing on blessing on blessing.

And the Lord of the Harvest, our Lord Jesus Christ, is calling us now to go forth as his chosen laborers, giving us enough of everything, and blessing you with abundance to build a better world.

Let's pray:

Jesus, you are our Lord and King. Pour out your Spirit upon us, and find us faithful for such a time as this. Find us faithful in what you have given us, that we may gather your harvest of justice and mercy, of kindness and steadfast love, for the sake of our nation, and neighbor, and world.

Amen.

Rev. Clinton G. Roberts