

“Fall of the Heart”

Preached 4/2/2014 at Trinity Lutheran Church

Focus Texts: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11; Hebrews 6:7-8; Galatians 6:7-10; and chapters 7, 8, and from *Spiritual Rhythm* by Mark Buchanan

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Sisters and brothers in Christ, may the God of grace and hope bless you in all the seasons of your heart. Amen.

When we think of fall, images that come to mind are some of the following: Trees that change colors, leaves on the ground, raking, an abundance of food, pumpkins, bonfires, football, thanksgiving, cool winds, blaze orange and deer season. What are some images that you think of when you think of the season of fall?

But perhaps the image and word that most comes to my mind for fall is: Harvest. The importance of the harvest is something I learned from my grandfather, who spent his life farming in Northwest Iowa. Harvest time is a special time for farmers, as the sight of combines at work throughout the day and into the night is a common sight. So important is the harvest, that these giant machines, the combines, are used only for this purpose perhaps a few weeks of every year. I remember the one time I was on my grandfather's farm and we actually got to use the combine, because this didn't happen very often with the harvest happening during the school year and we lived pretty far from my grandparents. But one year, we happened to make it out in the fall. And I remember being so in awe of what we were doing with this machine, in gathering up the corn that day, and just the amounts we were able to bring in.

The harvest in our area of the world happens in the season of fall. And in the fall, as we prepare for the harvest, we are in a mood and emotional state of expectancy. In the fall, our hearts are expectant. We are waiting on the fruits of our labors, anticipating the harvest of our work, and the benefit of the work we have done during the other seasons of our heart. It is a time of blessing, of waiting, of gathering. The fall of our hearts is a season of expectation and anticipation. But what is it we are expecting?

Harvest can be a time that the food and grain is plentiful. At least it is in good years. But we also know that some years, the harvest is a struggle. Flood, drought, hail, pests, and planting methods can all affect the success of a harvest. In Biblical times, the difference of a good harvest and famine was very thin. Harvest time was a time of reckoning. As the Bible talks about the harvest, something also becomes clear. The harvest was also about reaping and harvesting the seed that was sown and the work and care that was put into that sowing. So, as the harvest came about, there were also questions and consideration to the work that was done in sowing the harvest. What kind of sowing was done? What kind of work was done in preparation? What kind of seed was sown? And what impact does that have on our harvests in the fall of our hearts?

Hebrews chapter 6 says the following in regards to the harvest time and fall season: “Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless

and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over.” Hebrews talks about a good crop as a blessing, and a crop full of thorns and thistles as cursed. But how do they get that way? Do we play any part in what we sow and what we harvest?

Galatians helps give us part of that answer. “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.” “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all.”

For you reap whatever you sow. Paul uses the dichotomy of flesh and Spirit here as he often does, and in doing so asks us: do we sow out of our own desires, our own selfishness, or do we sow seeds out of the Spirit, out of God’s purpose. Seeds are meant to produce not only for us, but for the good of all. We reap what we sow.

So what is it that we sow? What are you planting in your hearts as you prepare for the fall? What are we expecting from our harvest in the fall of our hearts? We all sow seeds of one kind or another. But what kind of seeds do we sow?

This little saying on the slide speaks to what I think Paul is getting at in Galatians: “You must scatter the seeds. Love the seeds. Have complete faith in the seeds. Only then, will they become all that you hope for.” Do we plant in hope and expectation, or do we plant with gloom and doom? I would make one change in this little saying. We aren’t called to put our faith completely into the seeds. We are called to put our faith in God. And in doing so, in trusting in God, in recognizing God’s goodness in our lives, we are able to plant seeds of love, kindness, encouragement. Seeds of faith and gospel. If we become obsessed over our own seeds, our own sinful nature will take over, then we are more likely to spread seeds that do mock God. We then spread seeds of gossip, and criticism and fear. And we know what those seeds turn into at harvest time. They turn into thorns and thistles, and choke off the life-giving presence of God in our lives. What kind of seeds are you choosing to sow in your lives? Do you choose sowing seeds of kindness, love, and positivity? Or do you choose seeds of fear, criticism, negativity?

Thankfully, we are not the only ones who sow seeds in our lives and in our world. If it were left up to us only, we would have some pretty weak harvests during the fall seasons of our hearts. But God is sowing and planting seeds, too. God has a harvest on God’s mind, and we are a part of it. God is able to create a harvest in us, even though we are sinners. God is able to plant in us, and harvest in us fruit of the Spirit. Fruit that is life-giving. Fruit that helps guide our lives, inform our interactions with others, and assist us in planting seeds and anticipating the harvest of God in all that we do. God is able to plant seeds in our lives and in the world that change and turn our lives around.

This is what the text we read together from 2 Corinthians is about today. God is able to provide us with an abundance of blessings, so that we are able to share this blessing. God scatters his seed in an abundant, extravagant way. He does it this way because that is how God does it. God does not spare anything on our account. God is a bountiful and extravagant God, who loves us so much.

So again, what does God sow? God is at work sowing seeds of faith in the world, sowing seeds of faith in our lives. These are seeds of grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, and justice. Just to name a few. Seeds that bring life, rather than drain the life right out of us like a weed. And we benefit from this work of God. We feast on the fruit of these seeds. And we recognize that because God does this for us, we can go do the same in being generous and extravagant in the love and faith that we share with others.

What is our response to God's work in our lives during the fall of our hearts? We anticipate this great harvest of God's. A harvest that brings with it faith, both for us and for those that we share our faith with. It brings about a harvest of generosity, as we recognize that many blessings that we receive from God and are moved to share it with others. And a harvest of righteousness, which comes as a result of the other two. While we are sinners, our faith and the generosity of God bring about righteousness in our lives. We are made right with God, and are able to produce good fruit because of God's love for us.

Which leads to one final thing about the fall season of our hearts. In the fall, it is a season of thanks. In fall we are thankful, and aren't afraid to show our thanks of God. As we harvest, we complete our harvests with thanksgiving. And in doing so, being thankful engages and changes or orientations. What I mean is, we turn away from our inward focused selves, and in the season of fall we turn outwards and recognize God's place and prominence in our lives. It is easier to do during the fall, because as we harvest, we are so much more aware of God's goodness and mercy in our lives.

Sisters and brothers, I pray that God continually brings us into seasons of fall of our hearts, where we recognize God's goodness and abundance in our lives. As we trust in God's planting work in our hearts, may we also sow seeds of God's love, kindness, and compassion into the world, working with God to create a harvest of faith, generosity, and righteousness.

Amen.