

“Fellow Farmhands in God’s Field” 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 Epiphany 6A

Cheryl’s cousin Kirk is an Iowa farmer who told us on our last visit about how farming has really changed since his father Dean ran the farm. Nowadays, a driverless tractor can till, plant, and harvest the field, with the farmer monitoring it from a remote computer. Paul’s illustration of someone who plants and someone else who waters would not fit as it did in his day, when it took many hands to farm. Yet even today, getting food from the farm to your fork involves many hands in processing, packaging, transporting, stocking shelves, and tending the cash register. Whether it is crops, livestock, eggs, or milk, plenty of hands are needed.

Paul’s point is not who does what, but that there are different tasks involved in the work of God’s kingdom. We do our assigned part, but it is the same mission. We work as one unit for a common cause. Could God, like a driverless tractor, do it all himself? In some places, he has to through dreams and visions. Even then, those he calls he gathers into a community of other believers who do the watering of the faith He has planted.

The Biblical model is that God has called us to minister people to people. Each has a part to play. In Romans 10 Paul says that faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. But, he asks, how can they hear unless someone preaches that word, and how can they preach if no one sends and supports them in that task?

The problem again, as we saw a few weeks ago, was that the Corinthians were elevating their favorite minister over another. They were bragging about their pastors, not seeing that they were nothing but servants given a task to do by God. They were also not seeing their own role in ministry.

There are two important lessons for us in this text. First, the ministry of the church calls for all hands to be at work. We hold handles of different tools but each is necessary. As both planting and watering are necessary to yield a harvest of crops, so there are necessary roles involved to yield a harvest of souls in the kingdom of God.

What is your skill, gift, interest, and joy in serving? Invest it in the work of the kingdom. If you are a parent, your primary field is your family. Teach, correct, and edify your children with prayer and Scripture. Cultivate your own spirit in the same way at home and in the worshiping community of others with whom you can learn. That is the best way not to be an infant in the faith, but one who is growing.

Can you teach, then teach. Do you have particular skills in your hands and voice? Use them to build the kingdom. You may be a natural encourager. Do not neglect that gift, which so many need. If your financial wealth allows you more than the necessities of life, give joyfully according to your blessings. Yet do not be afraid to test God in giving even out of your need. He has a way of supplying your need in surprising ways.

Another important aspect of church ministry is that while we all do our part, we ultimately do not have power or control over the fruit of our labor. God gives the increase. A saying in Stephen Ministry is that the minister is the caregiver, but God is the cure giver. He is the healer of hurts, the transformer of hearts and giver of faith. We fulfill our task knowing that *he* is invested in the outcome and will honor the labor we give. He asks only that we do the task assigned us, giving of ourselves according to the measure of our faith. He will take care of the results.

After all, that is how he started the church. The foundation upon which the church grows is the cross of Christ. There Jesus sacrificed everything to show his love for us. He gave it all, without concern of who would believe. Jesus himself only planted and watered, but God’s Spirit gave the increase through the Gospel.

Jesus was faithful in playing his role for the sake of our salvation, even to the point of death. How fitting and proper to respond to such love by playing our role for the salvation of others, even if costs us everything. Our thoughts will be on love this Tuesday. So I ask, can we say that we truly love people if we are not willing to sacrifice for them? God loved us first, that we might love others. Amen.