

MISSIONAL METAPHORS: YOU ARE A FARMER

MATTHEW 9:35-38

In a few moments, we're going to go out and serve the Northland community in a variety of ways. Why is this important? It gives us the opportunity to actualize what we verbalize. In other words, we understand the value of and we talk a lot about the need to serve other people in the name of Jesus. Today, we have the opportunity to practice what we preach. If you really believe something is true, it's a joy to actually go out and do it: to make it actual in your life experience.

Now, from this Sunday through the end of July, we're going to be hearing about mission and outreach in a variety of ways. God wants to use you and me to tell and show other people who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. Next month, we're going to hear from two missionaries our church supports financially and in prayer. On July 22,are going to update us on their ministry through Campus Crusade down at Ohio University and a new, exciting opportunity opening up for them in..... Then on July 29, Jared and Chylo Trumbo will tell us about their ministry in China and a new, exciting opportunity opening up for them to work among international students in North Carolina. Now, when we hear the word "missionary" we think of really good, holy and smart people leaving our country to go to another country to share Jesus with the natives. That's a good thing, but it can intimidate us. It's easy to say, "Well, that's just not me. I'm not called or equipped to do that." So, let's use the word "missional" instead. Everyone may not be called to be a full time missionary, but every follower of Jesus is called to be missional. To be missional just means you find ways to share the message and love of Jesus with other people around you through the ordinary actions and words of your everyday life.

The Bible uses a wide variety of metaphors to help us understand what it means to be missional. Today, I want to remind you of a metaphor that Jesus used a lot in His teaching. By way of example you hear it in Matthew 9:35-38. Here's the missional metaphor: you're like a farmer only in a spiritual sense. You hear it again in a parable Jesus told. "Then Jesus said, 'God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps—harvest time!'" (Mark 4:26-29 MSG) There it is again: you're a farmer spiritually speaking.

Here are just a few obvious parallels between a real farmer and you. A farmer plants seeds. At a certain time each year, he diligently plants the seed of whatever crop he wants to produce: wheat, corn, you name it. If he wants to see any kind of harvest, the farmer's got to plant. Every follower of Jesus plants spiritual seeds. When your lifestyle and actions point another person to Jesus in some way, you just planted a seed. When you show compassion to someone in the name of Jesus – and some of us will have that opportunity today - you just planted a seed. When you get into a spiritual conversation or offer to pray for

someone – and some of us will have that opportunity today - you just planted a seed. When you invite someone to church – and some of us will have that opportunity today – you just planted a seed. So much of what we do here as a church is just planting spiritual seeds in people's lives. That's what we're going to do in just a few moments – plant spiritual seeds throughout the Northland community. I want you to keep that thought in your mind and heart as you go out today. Think of your life, your words and your actions today as being spiritual seed. You're planting an awareness of Jesus in other people's lives.

A farmer plants seeds. What else does a farmer do? Well, he trusts nature to do what only nature can do. He can plant the seed, but the farmer cannot make the seed germinate. He can't make it grow. He can't make it rain. He can't make the sun shine. In much the same way, every follower of Jesus trusts God to do what only God can do. You can plant some seeds today, but you can't force someone to open his or her heart to Jesus today. You can't make someone else respond spiritually. You can't create and maintain the conditions and thereby force a person to grow spiritually. All of that is up to God. You have to do what you can do and then trust God to do what only God can do. So much of what we do here as a church involves trusting God to do what only God can do in people's lives. There's no way in this life that we can measure the spiritual effect of what we're about to go out and do. But we can be sure it will have a spiritual effect that only eternity will fully reveal. So, let's go and out and plant our seed in faith!

A farmer plants seeds. A farmer trusts nature to do what only nature can do. What else does a farmer do? A farmer harvests the crop when it's ready. When it's ripe, the farmer cuts down and brings in his wheat, corn, or whatever. What's the spiritual parallel? Is it conversion – someone giving his or her heart and life to Jesus? Conversion is just the start of God's work in a person. Harvest makes me think of the kind of transformation that only Jesus can produce. Every follower of Jesus can share in God's transformation of people's lives – a kind of spiritual harvest that touches every area of life. It's seeing people live out God-honoring, God-glorifying lives. Sins forgiven. Shame and guilt blown away. Marriages healed. The chains of bondage to drugs, alcohol, debt, sexual sin or anything else broken. Relationships between parents and kids restored. Worship-filled lives. Insatiable hunger for God's Word. Aching hearts for lost people here and around the world. Lives overflowing with goodness. Spirit-empowered compassion for the least and the last here and around the world. That's the really fun, rewarding part of being a church and doing church – when you get to be part of God's harvest in people's lives. But if we're going to get to be a part of God's harvest in Northland, we're going to have to do some faithful, diligent spiritual planting in this community and then we're going to have to trust God to do what only God can do. So let's go out and do some planting. Then let's trust God. And then let's believe what God says elsewhere in His Word. "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up." (Gal 6:9 NLT)