

Let's talk about harvesting.

Not coming from a farming background—this example of Jesus' works less with me than his fishing examples. After all, my family worked on the water.

Here's the thing—I'm not the type of person, for good or ill, to just read my bible and hear:

*"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

—and think, "oh that's nice. God wants us to work for Him."

No—what I hear is "God wants us to cut down the people of God and so they can ready for consumption." Ew. How macabre.

'Cause that's what harvesting means. So—let's talk about harvesting.

Being a Maine native, I've always thought that it was incredible to see vast stretches of uncut timber forest stretching out for miles.

It's also incredible-- in a different way-- to see areas where they harvest by clear-cutting. It sounds like such an orderly thing: clear-cut. It reminds us of clearing space; it rhymes with "clean-cut". But when you see it, it's really not to be believed.

When I was in elementary school, my class took a day-trip to lumber country. It was amazing to see huge stacks of lumber piled 10 feet high. It was upsetting to see acres and acres of land harvested till there was nothing left, not a tree, not a shrub, not a blade of grass. Just stacks of lumber.

It's hard for my mind to equate what I saw then with this reading this morning. That can't be what Jesus had in mind.

Actually, I don't think that's what Jesus was talking about when he spoke these words.

I think that this passage has less to do with cutting things down, and more with being able to tell when things are finally ripe. After all, we don't harvest buds or tiny plants—we wait until they have reached maturity.

And Jesus says that people are finally ripe. But for what?

*For hearing Christ's message. For responding to Christ's message, and for becoming Christ's message.*

It takes several things to come together just right for our crops to finally be ripe enough to harvest.

It takes warmth, rain, pollination, and time.

And it takes the same things for the people of God to become ready to hear, respond and become. We need warmth and water and time to germinate and grow. I think it also takes realizing that everyone and everything is interconnected on a deep level.

Take oak trees. This is from a scientific journal.

*"Oak trees produce acorns on a seven-year cycle. Every year, they produce a few acorns, and then, on the seventh year, they produce a huge amount of acorns. This is called mast. It turns out that all the acorns in New England mast on the SAME 7- year cycle, because they can communicate with all the other oak trees across New England-- except the trees on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, which mast on a different cycle. The trees can't communicate that far."*

Huh. So all oak trees seem to be connected in some mysterious way. God is amazing to have built that into the trees, am I right?

Imagine—that kind of connection. No really—imagine humankind all connected in that mysterious kind of way.

I think we are. I think we are beginning to sense it. I think the Spirit is making it come alive.

When Jesus was sending out his apostles, he was sensing a readiness, a ripening in the people of his time to understand the good news he was bringing them. I'm not sure that they would have been ready for the message any sooner in history.

The message? Jesus told them that kingdom of God is here. All around us, within us, now. That it is possible to be healed of not only the things that tear us personally apart, it is possible to heal those things that tear us apart as people. In Jesus' time that centered on the tribal systems that made chasms between other peoples and religions.

The good news that the people were ripe to hear was the reality of the kingdom flowering all around them, Jews, gentiles, Greeks- which began the healing of all people. But the notion has never fully matured.

Until now. The idea of people working together to understand each other more fully has begun.

But you know what—the laborers are still few to get this message out. For whatever reason, in Jesus' time and in ours, this is one step too far for some people to take.

The idea that everyone is equally created and equally loved takes us out of the safety of our previous beliefs, and thrusts us into the whirlwind of change: change in our hearts, change in our behaviors, change in our very souls.

It will not be easy to labor for this message-- the kingdom surrounding us and the healing of all peoples—because it shakes up our opinions of who is in and who is out. But we're in good company: it shook up Peter and the disciples, too.

I think there are watershed moments in time when the people have grown enough to hear new urgings of the Spirit. I think we are in one now. We are witnessing the people “masting” together. I'm convinced that we are finally ripe to hear the Spirit leading us into the truth that all the people everywhere on this planet are in fact, all tied together in some mysterious way, though God who created each person just as they are—no mistakes—each blade of grass, each tiny bee and splash of rain.

This morning, Jesus says to us once again: share the good news—the kingdom of God is all around you and within you—and within everyone.

Healing is possible if you understand that we are all tied together, creation and created.

And I think we are ready. Mature. Ripe. Primed to hear this Truth inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Amen.