

Harvest of the spirit

*The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few;
ask therefore the Lord of the harvest
to send out labourers into his harvest.* Luke 10.2

Most of us know about a harvest. It's wonderful to be able to share our garden produce with friends and neighbours. Some of us enjoy making jam and chutneys to keep that special flavour happening throughout the year. And yet there is so much more to a harvest than simply what we gather and eat. We understand that you have to first prepare the soil, then plant the seeds or seedlings and that you need to nurture them so that the plants grow strong. In our dry Australian land, we understand how we need to provide sufficient water and fertiliser if the crop is to be much good.

Yet if we focussed on how much work there is to do, we may be overwhelmed and never get around to making a garden and we would miss out on those wonderful experiences of fresh from the garden produce. Generally, we know that when we put in a bit of effort, we will be rewarded by a good supply of delicious berries, fruit or vegetables...and I have to add flowers!

Jesus sent out his disciples to bring in a harvest of healing and bringing peace and fulfilment to people. He sent them two by two for company and encouragement; they would face many challenges in some places as well as being warmly welcomed in other places.

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

He instructed them to spend their time where it was most valued: offer peace to them and if he says, *'someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there...'*

There are many opportunities for us to speak out God's love and peace today. We need to recognise that our words are best received when they are 'in season'- spoken in a way that people can take on board, encouragement rather than criticism; affirmation rather than judgements.

It's helpful to recognise that Jesus sends out the disciples to prepare the way for himself. It's not solely our responsibility to spread the good news. We each need to do our part, **but it is God's work and we are the labourers**. God takes the principal responsibility and we are simply called to follow our gifting and to act in the power of the Spirit, allowing the Fruits of the Spirit, which Murray read about last week to flourish.

These are God's gifts to us; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control and the like. These are the fruits of the struggles we go through in life but only when we open our hearts to God and allow the Spirit to guide our actions and words, even when a situation we find ourselves in is heartbreaking or so challenging, we just want to do a doona dive - to hide away from our troubles. But the promise is here to be grasped: God will bring about the harvest, as surely as the tomato plants when well-watered, fertilised and nurtured will produce a crop.

In [Galatians 6](#), Paul instructs the Galatians to give themselves in bringing goodness into the world – correcting one another, working faithfully, providing for their teachers, and doing good (justice) at every opportunity. I once heard a helpful analogy of the phrase: *“Bear one another’s burden”*. It involves imagining these words accompanied by a mental picture of a weightlifter. If you’ve ever watched a weightlifter working out, you will have noticed that as he or she lies on the bench pressing the weights, there is another standing at their head. They train in pairs; someone always standing behind them. The Spotter stands just behind the weight Lifter’s head just in case the Lifter needs some help. Sometimes the Spotter doesn’t get to do anything at all. Just being there gives the Lifter the confidence to lift the weights.

Other times the Spotter would call out words to encouragement: *“You can do it”... “You CAN do it!”... “Well done!”* The encouragement was just what the Lifter needed to lift the weights. As more weights are added, and the bar becomes heavier, the Lifter will eventually reach his/her apex or will become very tired. At that point the Spotter’s role is to take the bar of weights from the Lifter. What happens next is that they swap places and the Spotter becomes the Lifter, the Lifter becomes the Spotter.

What a lovely metaphor for Paul’s injunction to *“Bear one another’s burdens”*. Sometimes we come across friends or associates who are going through difficult times and who may need some help to carry burdens of sickness, sadness or loneliness. Sometimes we don’t need to do or say anything. Sometimes it is enough that we are just ‘there’.

Sometimes they might just need a word of encouragement... *“You can do it”... “I believe in you”... I’m here for you”*.

Sometimes we do need to do some lifting, sometimes the burden is so heavy that they do need a hand to carry it and we need to put our hand in our pocket and provide some money, a warm coat to shield from the cold, maybe a home-cooked casserole to place on an otherwise empty table.

Back to the weightlifters. After helping to shelve the weights do you recall what they did? They swapped places! The beautiful part of Paul’s teaching about bearing one another’s burdens is that sometimes we are the Lifter and sometimes we are the Spotter. We must be willing to give help to others as well as to receive it. We need to be willing to be both Spotter and Lifter.

Today’s readings give us a wonderful collection of Scripture and plenty to reflect on. Take the Pew Sheet home. Look up the passages. Read the scriptures slowly and carefully. Come back to them during the week ahead. Make them yours. Let these readings help you to deepen your relationship with God. Allow yourself some ‘quiet time’ to do this. This time with God, allowing the Spirit to nurture our inner selves is just as important as preparing the soil, watering and fertilising our gardens when we want to have that fruitful harvest.