



Matthew 12:1-14

- 1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them.
- 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”
- 3 He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?”
- 4 He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.
- 5 Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent?

6 I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.

7 If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue,

10 and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

11 He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?"

12 How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.

14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

We discussed this passage of scripture recently when we talked about the nature of the Sabbath, but there is so much more to be said and focus today is not on the nature of the Sabbath so much as it is on “Harvesting Compassion.” So often we hear the words “Sowing seeds of Compassion,” where we reach out to those in need around us and give of ourselves and our resources to help meet their needs. Those are words to live by. But today I want us to talk about “Harvesting Compassion.”

The growing of crops is cyclical in nature. There is a time to plant and there is a time to harvest and it there is so much more to it than to say that we plant in the spring and harvest in fall. Some crops demand later planting and later harvesting. Some crops take longer to grow to maturity than other crops. Some crops have a very short growing cycle. There are even some crops that you can harvest three or four times before the fall. But what makes growing crops a cycle is that you have to plant it and you have to harvest it no matter how long the cycle. If you plant the seeds but don’t harvest the crop, what have you accomplished? If you don’t plant the seeds there can be no harvest, so again, what have you accomplished?

Those two things are obvious. But what about sowing, harvesting and then not distributing. Does grain actually serve a purpose if there is never any intent to use it? Please don’t misunderstand me. When stored properly, grain can be kept

for a very long time. Remember that Joseph supervised the storage of grain in Egypt so that the people would have grain throughout seven years of famine. But is there really any advantage to storing grain that will never be used?

Do you recall this parable from Luke 12?

16 And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.

17 He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.

19 And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

21 “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.

We touched on this when we talked about “The Good Life.” Sometimes we get so focused on the sowing, harvesting and storage of the things in our life that we forget why we were sowing in the first place. Because we have our priorities in the wrong place we forget why we are harvesting. Because we forget why we are harvesting, we start storing stuff away.

As much as I hate statistics, here are a few that I found interesting.

Almost 9% of American households rent a storage building. (Statistic Brain)

The annual revenue from self-storage facilities in the United States is \$36 billion dollars, more that double the global music industry. (Self Storage Association)

67% of self storage renters are from single-family homes, only 27% live in apartments. (Self Storage Association)

We are a nation of hoarders. We are a people that accumulates things. It seems to be part of our DNA. In most marriages there is a hoarder and disposer which is really not a bad thing as long as boundaries are set and everyone is in agreement. The “I might need that some day” syndrome keeps us from disposing of things in our life that bog us down. We have a difficult time letting go. And, just like the farmer in the parable, if we run out of room, we just make more room rather than letting go.

There is a wonderful network on the internet called FreeCycle. It's not like these Facebook sites where people are selling stuff that they no longer need. The uniqueness of FreeCycle is that everything on the site is free. Come and get it. I

don't need it anymore and if you can use, come pick it up. You see, with FreeCycle, you have to come to the table with the understanding that the goal is not about making money, it's about getting rid of the clutter in our lives while providing something to someone else that will enrich their lives. It's about replacing profit with compassion. It's about letting Ruth glean behind the harvesters. It's about letting the disciples take a few grains of wheat to ease their hunger without condemnation.

God's promise for us is that He will give us what we need. He will even provide us with resources to help others. He is really not in the business of giving us things to store away unless He is preparing us for a time of famine.

There are two sides of every coin and we so often talk about our giving. But I want to point out, wherever there is a giver there is a receiver. I am not talking about a taker, which is different from a receiver. A taker takes something without it being offered. It is not necessarily a reference to stealing but there is really no grace in taking something that has not been offered. It borders on selfishness.

But a receiver understands the nature of grace. While we strive to give of ourselves and our resources to help others, God has placed people in our lives that give of themselves and resources to help us.

Have you ever given something to someone out of compassion and grace and received anger in return? You give because you see the need but the receiver doesn't acknowledge the need? "I don't need any help," they cry, when, quite obviously they do. We have to remember that our job is to give regardless of what we get back.

There is a quote by Dr. Robert Schuller that I just love. He said "Find the need and fill it. Find the hurt and heal it." That is truly a basic part of our walk as Christians. We look for the needs and hurts of others and we rely on God to provide us with the resources to help fill the need and heal the hurt.

But sometimes, it is us who are in need. Sometimes it is us who are hurting. That is when we have to embrace the concept of "Harvesting Compassion." Why is it so hard for us to let others help us? Why is it so hard for us to appear to be vulnerable and in pain?

Part of it is the culture we live in. Part of it is the basic truth that we don't want to be a burden for anyone, including our children. But we have to accept that there are times when we are in the field and we are hungry, just like the disciples, and we need to "Harvest Compassion." We need for those around us to understand that we are struggling or that we are in pain so that God can provide them with the resources to be a blessing in our lives.

I'm not talking about throwing a pity party and I am not talking about taking advantage of those you love. I'm talking about coming to an understanding that it is not up to us as to how God meets our needs, that He uses the compassion of the people around us to fill our needs and heal our wounds. It is understanding that we are human and we are going to have needs and we are going to get hurt.

Jesus understands this. Just as He knew that the disciples eating of the wheat was going to rub some people the wrong way. The Pharisees were sowing legalism, not compassion. We have the unique opportunity to see the events unfold through Jesus' eyes. Jesus is sowing compassion by understanding the needs of His disciples. His disciples are harvesting that compassion.

This is shown in a poignant way when Jesus heals the man with the withered hand. It is important that we see that Jesus is looking to the Pharisees to see if they are seeing the difference between sowing legalism and sowing compassion.

Before He heals the man, He asks them, **"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"**

11 He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?"

12 How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Notice that He doesn't start with **"Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."** He encourages them to examine the concept that compassion trumps legalism. He leads them to an understanding that is contrary to their belief system. He shows them that their comprehension of the law has become warped because it ignores the human condition.

Just as important is His choice of words when he gets to that final statement before He heals the hurt. He does not say that it is good to heal on the Sabbath. He does not say that it is the right thing to heal on the Sabbath. He does not say that everyone should ignore the laws of the Sabbath. The conclusion that He draws to help them understand, is that because compassion is the key, that mercy and compassion need to be sown and reaped, that compassion and mercy is evident in the very nature of God, then is it **LAWFUL** to do good on the Sabbath. That compassion is not just a good thing, it is a legal thing. It completes the intent of the law. To not have compassion flies in the very face of why the law exists in the first place. The laws were made for man, not man for the laws.

All of this is important when taken in context, but somehow we forget about the man with the withered hand. Yes, Jesus healed Him. The man is a Jew. His whole life has been about obeying the law. Here is Jesus using Him to teach a lesson when you have to wonder what is running through His mind. Think about

it. “I truly want Him to heal me. I want to have the use of my hand back. I don’t want to continue to be a burden to those around me. I want to work. I want to get on with my life. But these men who are wise in the words of the law question if it is right for this man to heal me on the Sabbath. If I let Him do it, am I too breaking the law? Not to mention that after He leaves, I will still have to deal with the Pharisees and that will probably be very unpleasant.”

It must have been very difficult to be in His position, but He chose to Harvest the Compassion that was being offered. He chose to accept what was being offered rather than to succumb to pride. He allowed Jesus to now only heal him, but to use him as evidence of the way things should be, rather than the way things were.

The Bible often talks about the Israelites being a stiff-necked people. Stiff-necked is another way of saying self-pride. We talked about that when we talked about David and how he was determined to clean up his own mess; how so many people were hurt because he didn’t stop and allow God to fix the mess. We are a stiff-necked people. We really don’t want others to help us. We have a hard time letting God help us. We have a tendency to only turn to God when things get out of hand when God really wants to be a part of everything in our lives; that He has resources to share with us to overcome burdens before they ever become burdens.

But we have to Harvest the Compassion of those around us, including God. We have to allow Him to use others to fill our needs and heal our hurts. That's how he works. There is nothing unhuman about surrendering our lives to Him in every possible way.

Take time to meditate on the fact that Jesus died on the cross for each of us, even though we didn't ask him to. He knew our need even when we did not. That does not diminish the compassion that He sowed in our lives. Our task is to harvest that compassion with grace and humility.

This week I want you to think about not only the resources and compassion you are providing to others, but also about the compassion that you harvest from those around you. It is just one way of God letting us know how very much He loves us. We are community. We are unity. We are better together because that is how God gets things done in our lives.

Amen