

bringing the heart of the church to the heart of the city

Harvest

As I watch the leaves turn beautiful colors of red, yellow, and orange and fall gently to the earth, I am reminded how similar the ebb and flow of ministry is to the changing of the seasons. There is a season of hard work in preparation, a season of sewing seeds of friendship and kindness, a season of patient waiting on God to make Himself known in the lives of those around us, and a season of sharing in the harvest of His abundant grace. The past several months have been such a season, and we would love to share with you the some of the fruit of the harvest.

Beans and Tomatoes or Loaves and Fishes

For two summers now, dozens of members of Lexington First United Methodist Church have labored long and hard on the farm at the church's Andover campus. Every week these amateur farmers picked bags and boxes full of beans, tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, squash, okra, cucumbers, and more. Kathryn

and I have been blessed with the opportunity to share some of this produce with many of our neighbors and friends. These vegetables helped nurture relationships we had already started. An amazing thing happened. For every bag of produce we shared, we received something in return. We gave away a zucchini, and a few days later received zucchini bread. We gave away hot peppers, tomatoes and squash, and later that day we received Mexican *calabaza* soup. One neighbor gave us a huge bag of peaches from a tree outside of her apartment. Everyone had something to share even if it was just a story, a poem, or a picture they had drawn.

Like the biblical stories of the loaves and fishes, the vegetables seemed to multiply. One day, I was walking down the street, and a man yelled over to me, "Hey, thanks for the squash!" "You're welcome. Who are you?" I replied. I had never met him before, but apparently someone with whom we shared, shared with him. As the vegetables spread, so did our relationships with our neighbors.

Bicycle Redemption

About six months ago a dear family from our neighborhood packed up all they owned into an Oldsmobile

and moved to Tennessee. Before they left, they locked up six bicycles in our back yard. After many months awaiting their return, we contacted a family member who informed us that the family would not be returning any time soon and we could give away the bikes.

A short time later, we had an incident involving a neighborhood kid stealing one of the bikes. I confronted him at his house and demanded the bike back. Several weeks passed, and I asked a few of the neighborhood kids if they would like to help me fix up the bikes. In return, each kid who helped could take one of the bikes home. The first Saturday, only one kid showed up. I asked him where his friends were. He shrugged his shoulders and looked around. Suddenly he caught sight of a kid walking down the sidewalk and ran off to get him. He returned a minute later with the kid who had stolen the bike earlier in the month. The boy seemed reluctant to return to the scene of the crime, but in no time the three of us were hard at work fixing up the bikes. For three weeks, the young men worked diligently to repair leaky tubes and rusty chains. Each week, more kids came until all the bikes were fixed and claimed by their proud owners.

the beat

to get the full scoop, www.downtownpulse.org

our street-name "Green Acres" :: teaming Athletes in Action with kids :: Peeps from a pimp :: The Mission Bootcamp :: city prayer walk :: The Ink Tank :: Saturday morning pancakes and front porch conversations



the Kingdom of God is near

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ...When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. ... (Luke 10:1-3, 8-12; NIV)

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." This verse is often quoted by Christians when talking about missions. It is a call to action, which we Christians like to have. We like to be useful, meaningful, and productive. However, Jesus' instructions do not end with that verse, in fact it just begins. So, if we end our discussion about missions with that verse, we never really hear what Jesus' missional instructions were for His disciples.

I can see why we like to stop there. Just after that, Jesus talks about the disciples being "like lambs among wolves." That is neither comforting nor fun, especially when there are so many other important things in our lives that compete for our time and attention. Then, Jesus tells His disciples to depend upon the hospitality of those they are sent to, that they should heal the sick and announce that the Kingdom of God is near. Each of those things seem so out of the ordinary for us. It's easy to understand why these verses rarely get into the conversations about missions. We can jump ahead to the next part, where Jesus says if His disciples are not welcomed, they should brush the dust off their feet and in judgment say "the Kingdom of God is near." That is so much easier on our part, isn't it? To say, "well, they just don't want what we have to offer, so we did our part, and it's their own self-condemnation." In terms of urban ministry, I hear things like, "they are ungrateful," "they are lazy," "they are drunk."

However, John and I can tell from the harvest of this past year, we have been welcomed. Our home has become known as a house of refuge. Near strangers have come to our door asking for prayer. They have come to us saying that they want healing, and they desperately crave a world that looks like the Kingdom of God. In the past week and a half, I have prayed with two different women who live in the boarding houses across the street. Both times,

their bodies went limp under the stress of the oppressive lives they live in their kingdom of crack cocaine. They sobbed in my arms, both recognizing the need for a miraculous way out of this impossible mess they have found themselves in.

As missionaries, we have to realize that we have come to eat what is served to us, not just pass out food to the hungry. We have come to heal the sick, an expectation that our Creator God can do more than our clinics and medicine. We have come to announce that the Kingdom of God is near. Jesus, Lord of God's Kingdom, has come to overcome the kingdom of drugs, the kingdom of loneliness, the kingdom of pride, the kingdom of economic uncertainty, the kingdom of busyness.

Is missions easy? Of course not. Jesus said that His disciples would be like lambs sent out among wolves. However, the harvest is promised. Jesus' disciples returned and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17). If we go out thinking that we will be useful, meaningful, and productive on our own accord, we will likely return disillusioned. However, if we trust that the power of God is greater than our own, then when Jesus says the harvest is plentiful, He is saying that the fruit of ministry is real. We can trust that even "demons" of addiction, oppression, domestic problems, economic problems have no staying power in the light of Christ.

This is the harvest that we bring to you. We have been sent out to the city of Lexington. We have been welcomed by the most unlikely people. We endeavor to depend upon the promise of the truth of His message and on the reality of His power, so that sick will indeed be healed, and everyone will know of the coming of His Kingdom.



AROUND THE CORNER

Continuing our 9-month urban missions training class - The Mission Bootcamp

Learning from our "culture guides" in the city

Horizon Meetings with The Mission Society - 25 year plan/vision casting

6th Annual Christmas Caroling and Chili Cookoff



contact us!

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Please contact us if you would like to be added to our monthly email prayer letter.