

Your Harvest Field

Acts 18:1-11

I've wanted to do a sermon series on the book of 1 Corinthians for a long time but held back because it's such a long book. But as I thought about what series to do next and what would be good for us to go through as a church, 1 Corinthians kept coming to mind, so I've decided to go for it. I don't think I've ever preached through a book this long before, and I know some will love it, but others might get weary. So I'm going to take some breaks to preach about other things when fitting, but then come back to this great book. Also, within the book itself are some portions that will be like a mini-series. So I trust it will be an enjoyable, encouraging, and fruitful study for all of us. Today I want to focus on the founding of the church in Corinth, which is actually found in the book of Acts.

Jesus saved us for a reason and he's keeping us here on earth for a reason, rather than taking us to be with him right away. It's not just about my salvation and my relationship with God. Christ is building his kingdom in the hearts of a vast multitude of people and that kingdom that will spread throughout the world as his lost sheep hear the gospel and come into the fold. And he has chosen to spread his kingdom through his sheep – and that's you and me. He saved us to bring us into the fold and he has us here on earth to bring others into the fold.

But if you're like me, the work of bringing others into the fold is a tiring work. It requires intentionality and focus. It requires time and energy. It requires effort and sacrifice. And the good news we have to share isn't always met with open ears or open arms. It can be a difficult and uncomfortable work and that can have a diminishing effect on our motivation.

I have to be honest that I've been pretty discouraged in recent years about reaching my mission field, which I see as mainly my neighborhood. When we first moved into our house 17 years ago, I was enthusiastic about building relationships with my neighbors with the hopes that there would be opportunities to share the gospel. We hosted Bible studies and had neighborhood picnics and I was looking for opportunities to talk about Jesus. We've helped with projects, delivered cookies, and done Christmas Caroling. And there has been some fruit with neighbors who are already Christians, but when it comes to those who are lost, we haven't seen much fruit. One neighbor made it clear that talking about

“religion” was off limits. Another showed no interest after multiple occasions. My efforts to build relationships have seemed mainly one-sided. Everyone has been friendly, but nobody seems interested in knowing Jesus.

I’ve been discouraged, and if I’m honest, I haven’t really done much for the last couple of years. But Christ has called us to make disciples and reach the lost and that means being missionaries in our very own neighborhoods with the people he’s put in our lives. Is there any encouragement for those who might be feeling like me?

I was encouraged this week by what I read about how the church in Corinth began, and that’s what I want us to look at today. Corinth was a busy city in the 1st century A.D., located on the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea in present day Greece. (Picture) Paul went there on his second missionary journey in about 50 A.D. and we read about his time there in Acts 18.

Read Acts 18:1-4.

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

So when Paul first went to Corinth, there were no Christians and there wasn’t a church. That’s the kind of places he had a passion to reach. He wanted to be the first one to share the good news with people who had never heard. So he found a married couple who were Jews and tentmakers by trade and since Paul also made tents, they made a connection. He moved in with them, made tents during the week, and began to speak in the Jewish synagogue on Saturdays, trying to persuade both the Jews and the Greeks that Jesus was the Messiah.

Paul was very motivated to reach lost sheep and devoted his life to going to new places to find them. God has called some from this very church to do the same thing and may be calling you, but most of us are going to remain here. The mission is the same. Whether you’re a pastor or a school teacher or a stay at home mom or a tradesman, our mission is the same – to reach the people around

us with the light of Jesus, that they might turn to him for eternal life. Paul did it his way, you do it your way. We each have our own mission field.

But like I said earlier, it isn't all that easy, and it can be discouraging, so what encouragement do we have to start where we're at, or to keep going? Let's read on...

Read Acts 18:5-11.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶ And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." ⁷ And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." ¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

At first, Paul faced discouragement and resistance, and in his context he faced quite a bit of hostility. Some people wanted nothing to do with Jesus and didn't want Paul teaching about him. So they opposed and reviled him to the point where he'd had enough. He quit kicking the dead horse and took a different approach.

Titius Justus opened his house to him and Paul continued to preach there. And people began to believe and turn to Jesus. Many believed and were baptized. Even though he hit a dead end in one place, Paul didn't quit. The Lord opened another door, and he walked through it and he began to see fruit. I think that can be an encouragement to us, that just because we don't see fruit in some people's lives or with certain neighbors, family members, or friends, that doesn't mean others won't be interested. Move on and go through another open door. Don't be afraid to share with someone else. As hard-hearted as some may be, others may be ready and waiting. Jesus taught his disciples in Matthew 10:14: "*And if anyone*

will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.” Move on and look for those who are receptive.

I can be very hesitant to talk to people about the Lord because I just assume their response will be the same as some of my neighbors, but they're not the same people! I have no idea what God is doing in their life and God might use me to open their heart to him. Keep planting seeds, keep sharing, keep loving, and God will open the doors.

I want us to pay attention to what the Lord said to Paul, which encouraged him to keep doing ministry in Corinth for a year and a half. The Lord told him *“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”* Keep sharing Jesus with people because there are many more in this city that aren't in the fold yet, but belong to me, that only need to hear the gospel and they will come.

Do you think that might be true in Amery? How about Clear Lake? Turtle Lake? The neighbors on your street? The people down the road?

Wayne Grudem uses the illustration of fishing to help us see this spiritual reality. This would be like someone inviting you to go fishing and guaranteeing that you're going to catch some fish. Sure, you might try one spot where they aren't interested, but eventually you're going to find a spot where they're hungry and ready to bite. So don't give up, keep trying!

When Jesus was doing ministry with his disciples, before he sent them out to minister to people he told them this in Matthew 9:36-38: *“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”* He told them, “The harvest is ready, we just need people to go out and bring it in.”

When he made an unexpected trip into Samaria and people began receiving his message and believing in him, he said this to his disciples in John 4:35-42: “Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift

up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.”

And in the next few days he continued sharing with the people and more and more turned to him. It says: *“³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”*

The church in Corinth began because Paul didn't give up when the first people he tried to convince didn't listen and turned against him. He shared with others and they believed and the church grew rapidly during his time there.

There are people in your circle of influence that you have contact with who belong to God but just don't know it yet. They need someone to show them the way and invite them into the fold. Each of us has a field that is ripe for the harvest and Jesus is sending us into that field to do his work. Where is your field? Who has Christ called you to share him with? Who does he want you to invite to youth group or church? Who does he want you to serve and pray for?

Mark Robey is one of our elders and his mission field is his workplace. Mark works with Muslim people from Somalia and sees his work as an opportunity to minister to others. So I've asked Mark to come and share a few stories this morning about a man named Ollie...

Mark share.

Each of us has a field that is ready for harvest. Let's ask the Lord to give us a heart like his to go and reach people for him.