

Waiting for Harvest

People have been planting their gardens. Some weeks ago, people were anxious to get their gardens in. When I was growing up, we planted our garden on Decoration Day. There was little point to being ahead of that with the chance of frost in the mountains of along the Mason-Dixon Line.

With gardening, we work the ground. We mark off the rows, make furrows, and plant the seed. It is time-consuming work, even for a small plot.

Seed packets (or Google) provide information about germination time, seed spacing, and days to harvest. Some vegetables are planted close together and mature rather quickly. Others are sown: farther apart and take more time to produce a harvest. Although we know better, we are somewhat disappointed when we walk around the garden the first few days after planting, and it seems as if nothing is happening. Why, the corn should be up, and the radishes ready to pick!

Of course, we all know that is silly impatience talking. And yet, I hear many Christians saying or thinking the same thing about the church and evangelism. We might wonder, "Where is the response to our efforts?" For example, some seem to want instant results with Saturate USA.

Again, we know better. We are conditioned to expect instant results. We put a cup of water in the microwave --shazam!-- hot water for tea or coffee. We hit a switch --poof!-- lights on or off. We preach a sermon, or teach a Sunday School class, or witness to someone at work or school-- we want to see results right away.

Yet, just as with the garden, or the field crops, a harvest of souls or change of life is not instant. It is a process. We plant seed (the Gospel). We try to keep the weeds (sin) down, and provide water and nutrition (the Word of God) to that which is growing. We even at times thin (discipline) the crop so that what is left may produce. a strong plant and a bountiful harvest. Ultimately, with much patience, and prayer, and hard work, we see a harvest.

It is striking to see that not all plants mature at the same rate, or produce the same kind of fruit or vegetable. I am glad that the whole garden does not come ready at the same time. In a few weeks, we pick some radishes and lettuce, (before it gets too hot). Later, we'll have cucumbers, beans, and carrots. Still later, tomatoes, and pumpkins will arrive. Each will be right on time, and will be the right kind of produce.

The church is much like this. We may not have hordes of people coming constantly, but a consistent harvest of souls and changed lives is really what we are wanting. Not all will respond in the same way or at the same rate, but response comes, in God's grace and timing.

A final note on this theme: In our gardens, we can weed, water, fertilize, thin, etc., but I have absolutely nothing to do with whether I receive a harvest. The seed is sown, but God makes the seed to germinate. We water, but God makes it grow. Paul reminds us, "God gives the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

It is solely by His sovereign grace that we receive any harvest in the end. It is that way in the church, too. God does not intend every garden to be a tremendous producer, and He does not intend that every church be a mega-church, or a Merriam Chapel, or a Blue River. Each one has its part, and God is sovereign over each one. We must work the work He has given us.

For now, we plant the seeds and water the growth. Our job is to be faithful where we are, and trust God to do the work of granting a harvest.

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