

SERMON FOR MAY 2, 2021 BY PASTOR GERRY AT TRINITY UCC, MANCHESTER, MD

SER21-15 "COUNT IT ALL JOY...THE JOY OF THE HARVEST: Two Brothers and Their Barns" John 15:1-11

"There are some things I need to say to you today about our relationship with each other--you and me, pastor and congregation, and your relationship with each other.

The texts, however, for today, are providential in the sense they are perfect for what I have been thinking about to say to you this morning. The gospel text for this morning has Jesus saying, in essence, "there's a lot of work to be done." That's from Jesus' perspective as he looks out over the multitude of human needs. Things haven't changed in our world – only maybe the needs are even greater + more complex world today. And even after 3 years, Jesus is right about Trinity church also – there is a lot of work to be done.

And the Jesus says, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few (v. 37). So, what does Jesus do? He calls again to him his 12 disciples and gives them the same power over human misery and weakness that he himself has shown. Not too much different for us, in that I hope I have equipped you, the best I could over these years, to be the disciples and leaders and followers Trinity Church needs in these days ahead. There's this story I must tell:

It was the story which the rabbis tell about the two brothers who lived side by side on separate farms. The story, as told and adapted by various storytellers (especially Michael Williams) goes like this: One of the two brothers had a wife and family, while the other brother had remained single and lived by himself. These two brothers developed a deep love and affection for one another.

The brother who lived alone became concerned about his brother who had a wife and children for which he had to provide. This first brother thought to himself, "My brother has many mouths to feed and all the concerns that go with a family, and all I have to care for is myself. I certainly have more than enough for one. But I do not know if my brother would ever come to me for help."

The unmarried brother then decided on a plan to help his brother and family. When nighttime came, he would take a basket of grain from his barn and carry it to the barn belonging to his brother. He was sure that his brother would never notice an extra basket of grain, and he would be able to help his brother without his feeling obligated to repay him or even thank him.

About the same time the married brother started thinking, "Look how fortunate I am, with such a fine family to care for me now and in my old age.

Yet my brother has no one but me. I have more than enough for me and my family. But I do not know if my brother would ever come to me for help.

And so, the married brother came up with a plan to help his single brother without his knowing it. When nighttime came, he would carry a basket load of grain from his barn to that of his brother. Certainly, his brother would not notice an extra basket of grain. He could therefore help his brother without his knowing or feeling obligated to repay him or even thank him.

Now after these two brothers had carried out their plans for several months, they both saw that they never had fewer baskets of grain. This seemed strange, since every night they would each carry away one basket. However, they reasoned, this just proved that one basket of grain would not be missed.

Late one moonlit night, each of the brothers went out from their barns at the same time to carry the grain to the barn of the other. As they came to the line dividing their farms, each brother recognized the other. At that moment they confessed to one another their schemes. Laughing together, they put down their baskets and hugged one another in brotherly love.

The rabbis used to say that such love was rare, even among brothers. Tradition holds that Solomon built God's temple at the spot or place where the two brothers met and embraced that night.

That place where the two brothers met was a loving place, indeed. I've wondered: What is it about this story that touches us? What is it about the relationship of the two brothers that is instructive to us this morning? I think this story touches us and informs us--you and me--in at least four ways.

First, the brothers sought to help each other, to build each other up. Help offered in an unassuming, even anonymous manner. Each investing in the other. Second, the brothers loved each other. Love offered in an active and practical way. Love freely given, just because the other was a brother; just because the other might be in need. Third, the brothers shared themselves with each other, because they were concerned about the other. Sharing even without acknowledgement. Each wanted, I think, for the other **to be the very best he could be.** And finally, the brothers celebrated each other. When they discovered their efforts to care for the other, they hugged in the openness of that moonlit night. What a wonderful moment that was. We all yearn for relationships that are bound together by such openness.

I believe these four qualities of the brother's relationship helping, loving, sharing, celebrating, are terribly relevant to our lives this morning. Relevant to each of you, personally and individually, and to you as a congregation as

you enter a new era in your life as a church and as you release me as your interim pastor.

I said 3 years ago that I didn't expect our relationship to be perfect. I am not perfect. And indeed, I haven't been perfect. I haven't tried to be perfect. So, along the way we've had our differences. No doubt the two brothers had their differences, their little sibling spats. They probably did things that irritated the other. But undoubtedly their deep love and hope for the other overcame those problems.

We have invested much in each other over these years. I have done all I could to help you be the best people you can be – to be the best disciples you can be. I have worked hard to be a helping, loving, sharing, and celebrating pastor. And so have you been a helping, loving, sharing and celebrating force in my life. I don't mean this in a literal sense, of course, but you have often brought a basket of grain to my barn. That has helped me be the very best minister I could be. And then you have given me the opportunity to bring baskets of grain to your barns.

And when our relationships got difficult, when you were irritated because I did or said something you didn't like, some of you came to me personally and directly, in love, in hope, and explored way, together, we could make the relationship right again. And you know what? When we speak with each other and our honest hurts and resentments, indeed, when we speak the truth with love, we find peace in each other and peace in God.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul says: **Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.**

So, for the most part, we have "Talked with each other; listened to each other; helped each other; invested in one another; helped each other be the very best we can be; we took baskets of grain to each other.

And our barns are full --- our lives are full, and we didn't do in the dark of night – we did it right out in the light of the day.

May it continue to be so in Trinity Church in your lives in the future.
Amen.