

**SERMONS AT TRINITY**

**Sunday, November 16, 2008**

**“Reaping”**

The Rev. Sare Gordy

Good morning.

You know, all week, I have had this one line haunting me, chasing me, following after me in situation after situation. It's part of the response of the third servant or worker from that reading from the Gospel according to Matthew. "I knew you were a harsh master who reaps where he has not sown."

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There's a lot you could say about that response. It's full of fear. It comes from fear – a fear-based response, some might say. It's a far cry from the abundance mentality of the other servants. And, in fact, it's incorrect, though perhaps not the first part, according to the story; the master is harsh, in the end. But, the master is harsh because this is yet another apocalyptic parable, preparing for the 'Return of the Master' (you've perhaps noticed that they all end in 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' for those who prepare badly?)... all this because clearly the lectionary has begun advent before the rest of us.

All week it has been at the back of my mind – is God a harsh master? Does God reap where God has not sown? But when I put it like that, it sounds utterly ridiculous to my ears.

Is God a harsh master? That sounds to me a little like blaming God for the bad things that occur to us, as if God chose to punish some, and not others, and that is not a vision of God that I've ever found compelling or really, even strong enough to bear close scrutiny. Quite the contrary, we can see very plainly, and even more plainly as time goes on, that our actions have consequences. As Cam recently said, all our actions have consequences, even the smallest, even the choice to throw a piece of paper away rather than recycle it has far reaching consequences, though we might not be able to know them intimately. We might not know when those consequences are coming back to us, or hitting other people. But everything we do has a consequence, and considering the state of our world and the state of humankind's consequences – global warming and the poisoning of our living environments, staggering world poverty, the shameful gap between the rich and the poor, the pandemic of violence, rampant disease that is largely preventable, and hatred that seems to know no bounds – considering the bed we've made and are now lying in, I think it's a miracle that God

hasn't disowned us yet. I think it's miraculous that God still loves us, much less talks to us; it is astounding to me that God is still with us, helping us to become something better.

So, God, a harsh master? Quite the contrary – God is patience personified and forgives constantly. But does God reap where God doesn't sow? This one seemed trickier, and not quite as clear cut as the first. On the one hand, we could consider it this way – God neither reaps nor sows. In this world view, we have talents and abilities and we either use them efficiently or moderately, and we can use them efficiently or moderately in ways that help the state of the world and other people, or in ways that do not... or we can use them not at all. And whatever we do has consequences. As my mama likes to say, you make your bed, then you lie in it. But in this world view, we sow, and the whole world reaps – not just us alone.

But then again, on the other hand, we could consider it this way – God both reaps and sows. We have talents and abilities, but we have them because God gave them to us. They are God-given talents and abilities, and we ourselves are the seeds that have been sown by God. In this way, the consequences of our actions are the fruit of the seeds that have been sown. Again, by this measure, God has been a rather gracious reaper, when you consider how much violence, distain, hatred and contempt has been gathered from the fields that God has sown. But then again, story after story where God is the reaper reminds us that God gathers it all, good and bad, and after all is said and done, which perhaps happens every time the clock ticks, God gently blows away the chaff that has been gathered with the wheat, because underneath the violence, distain, hatred and contempt that has been gathered, there is some measure, hiding underneath, of love, peace, reconciliation, hope, justice, and forgiveness.

And then God, the sower who keeps on sowing, plants that all over again. The violence may reseed itself like thistles in your garden, but the love gets replanted, resown, season after season, and as always, it is up to us to chose whether or not we'd like it to grow in us, in our lives.

Amen.