

Sermon, *Reap What You Sow (Weeping May Spend the Night but Joy Comes in the Morning)*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 7.6.25

(On the night/morning of July 3rd to 4th, a flash flood swelled the Guadalupe River in central Texas, largely Kerr County, and swept away hundreds of people including campers at Camp Mystic. By Sunday morning, the 6th, 25 campers were still missing.)

Happy Independence Day Weekend. We had a great celebration as did those on Longboat Key. But not all are celebrating this weekend. As you know, the flash flood in Texas has resulted in many heartbreaks and missing people, including campers. This hurts. I'm a camp guy. Camp was central in my development – especially my faith life. I've attended camp for as long as I remember. I was a camp counsellor. My boys have been to camp; Elijah is going twice this summer. So for me to hear the stories of campers being swept away in flood waters hurts.

The sermon for this Sunday was going to be about “you reap what you sow” but I can tell you of those families that are anxiously searching for their lost children, they are not reaping what they sowed. As far as I am concerned, they didn't cause this to happen yet here they are in a nightmare.

In the first century when Jesus started his earthly ministry, the manifold theology was that when tragedy strikes it is because someone is reaping what they sowed. (For those not familiar with that term, sowing is planting seeds and reaping is harvesting) For instance, some religious leaders pointed to a blind man who was begging for money. They asked if it was his sin or his parent's sin that made him born blind. Jesus said they are wrong – he's blind so that those with sight can experience (see) the Kingdom of God. Early this year, Jesus cited a construction accident when the Tower of Siloam fell. Jesus asked, “Where the workers who died any worse sinners than all you all?” The unspoken answer was “yes, they were worse sinners (because look at how they died)”. Upon not hearing an answer, Jesus said, “No, but unless all you all repent, you'll end up just like they did.” In other words, all are sinners; all fall short of the glory of God. We don't, however, get what we deserve from our sinfulness when we ask for forgiveness because God always forgives.

So if tragedy isn't a sign that some are worse sinners than others, what does “reap what you sow” mean. In a positive sense, if you sow to the Spirit you will reap eternal (abundant) life. If you focus planting forgiveness, peace, love and joy, you will harvest the same. If, in the negative, you sow “to the flesh”, which, speaking for St. Paul (who wrote this in his letter to the Galatians), would mean if you sow division, anger, hostility and suspicion, you will receive the same.

Another way to look at this is that God will let us sleep in the bed that we made. We have the ability to sow our own plants. God, of course, wants us to sow to the Spirit; but, God will let us sow to the flesh.

A theologian I read about in seminary told a story that happened to him when he was a new pastor. He walked into the hospice room of a woman dying of multiple problems, emphysema being the prominent cause. She had a trachea tube that she would use to chain smoke through. The young pastor walked in. Between fits of coughing and smoking, the patient covered up her

tube (so she could speak) and squeaked out these words: “Why is God doing this to me?” The pastor/theologian/author wrote that this is not the time to bring up “you reap what you sow”. That’s not a pastoral response but rather a way to live. In this hospice room, he asked, “Tell me about God who you said is doing this to you.” He got her to talk more about her belief system and then redirected her to remember that God will save her and that her risen soul will be free from addiction and disease.

In our Gospel lesson, we heard one of the most important phrases in the New Testament: Jesus appointed 70 to go out into the cities where he intended to go. He told them to bring no purse or food, but to eat what is placed before them. He told them to go into a house and say, “Peace be upon this house,” to proclaim that the Kingdom of God has come near, and to heal and cure. The importance of this phrase is that Jesus could have done this differently. He could have sent out angels to do the work; or to do it all himself; but instead, he sent the 70. The very, he “appointed”, is an aorist tense which I translate this way: he has sent, is sending and will send out people to proclaim the Kingdom of God has come near. All of us who profess Christ as Lord have been influenced by those who were sent out. God has children, not grandchildren. We believe because of what someone shared with us, not because we were born into it.

The appointed ones sowed to the Spirit. They proclaimed peace, God’s Kingdom, and healed. We too are called to sow the same way in the Spirit. We are called to proclaim peace, God’s Kingdom is near, and to heal. But, God is not going to force us to do this. We can instead sow anti-peace, sow the division of our world, and take what you can from others. But, if we do that, we will also harvest that in our lives too.

One more thing about reaping and sowing. Jesus didn’t appoint the 70 to build the kingdom. It’s already built. He sent them out to proclaim it. To point out the Kingdom to others. They were harvesting what they did not plant. When it comes to God’s grace, forgiveness, love, joy and peace, we reap what we did not sow. The psalmist, most likely King David, wrote about this in Psalm 30. He wrote, “God brought me up from the dead, God restored my life as I was going down to the grave.” King David did not live as a saint. But, he did have a tremendous faith in God. He knew he couldn’t help himself and that his life was heading toward the grave but God, in God’s grace and power and love, restored his life and brought him back up from the dead.

David wrote, “Weeping may spend the night but joy comes in the morning.” He knows that there are times where we are sad – because of tragedy or because of what we have sowed with our own hands – but because of God’s outpouring love and grace, joy comes in the morning. Amen and alleluia.

It is with this hope and faith that many are turning out to help the families in central Texas whose lives have become tragic. Weeping is going on. But, one day, joy will arrive as certain as the sun rises. He has sent and is sending us to go out and proclaim this Kingdom, the place of love, joy, forgiveness and peace, is here, among us and with us and in us. We are sent to go out and proclaim peace so that others who follow us with harvest what we have planted in the Spirit.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.