

Following the harvest (John 4)

the spiceBox

by Sharon Robertson, Lt. Colonel –

Migrant workers are a familiar sight in farming communities. They follow the crops in the harvest season, and many a farmer relies on the labor they provide. Much of the work is backbreaking, requiring patience, skill, celerity and long hours of arduous labor in physically demanding conditions. Probably not the first choice of occupation for most people, but critical to the well being of us all.

Migrant workers don't always get to pick the crops they work on—following the harvest, they take the jobs that become available. Their money is not great. They need the work, however, and the income it brings. They work hard and move as quickly as they can, since compensation is often tied to the total product of their labors. They know that—they accept that—as part of the job. It's got to be done, and it must be done while the crop is at its peak. They do it.

Jesus knew about harvesting. Many of the metaphors and similes he employed reflected knowledge of the various aspects of farming, and always it was the harvest that was most critical. The farmer's attention was focused on producing the best, most abundant harvest possible, and he worked to that end. Jesus spoke of tilling the ground, of planting, weeding and reaping. He knew the labor involved. And he knew the importance of recognizing when the harvest was at hand—the critical moment. It does not always come when you think it should; you have to be alert to the signs.

That is why Jesus used the metaphor of harvest in speaking to his disciples: *“Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest?’ I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages; even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor”* (John 4:35-38, NIV).

The Salvationist's harvest

The Salvationist is the migrant worker of the Christian community; he or she is most often given the mission to go where the harvest is, not to polish the fruit after it has been harvested by others. The



task of the Salvationist is to claw through the brambles, dig through the mud, climb to the highest branches, working in any and all conditions to harvest any and all fruit in reach. It is not up to the worker to evaluate the fruit, to decide if it is top quality and will bring the best price in the market; he is there, she is there, to rescue the crop, to make it available to the Master for whatever plans he may have for it. The material compensation (the allowance or paycheck, the housing, the car, all those material things we value) is not the issue, nor is public (or administrative) recognition of one's good work; even the praise of the Master Himself is secondary—it is the harvest itself that is critical: if it is not completed in a timely manner it may be lost forever. That man, that woman, that child who is the fruit God intended to be harvested by you may be lost forever.

Look around you: that neighbor, that ragged and dirty fellow on the street corner, that advisory board member, that smelly kid who ought to be (or is) in your Sunday school class, that talky woman who bores you to tears, that obnoxious guy who thinks the world revolves around him, that shy kid who thinks that world would be better off without him—the ordinary people you meet every day, and the stranger who makes you nervous—that's our harvest, the harvest ripening before our eyes. It's not always easy to tell when it's ripe enough, but we do our best, and, when we allow it, the Master of the harvest is always available to clue us in.

Jesus found a field ripe for harvest where his disciples saw nothing but weeds. "Open your eyes!" Jesus said. "I'm telling you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe already!"

But, Jesus, please—help us see! Open our eyes to the need for workers in your arid, less cultivated fields. Make us strong in faith, fit for the back-breaking labor of ministering to the unloved, dirty, the sick, the smelly, the crying—the ones who truly need us—and YOU.