

Title: "URBAN FARMERS"

Text: Luke 9: 62

This morning my memory takes me back to the hills of Hereford and Camp Mensch Mill,

where Confirmation retreats and summer camp had youth
and adults walking up the steep path,
fenced in on each side with a stand of pine trees.

The grassy slope at the top became an outdoor chapel with a vantage
point of fields and a small stand of trees that echoed the sound of a
farmer's tractor,

pulling the plow or sickles and baler, back and forth, cutting a
pattern of perfectly spaced rows.

The rhythmic sound became a melody for the lyrics of Jesus' Gospel
words:

*"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back
is fit for the kingdom of God."*

with a descant voicing the recurring word: "FOCUS!"

The word for a farmer working with acres, and for us urban farmers,
with lawns and garden plots, "FOCUS!"

"Focus on keeping each row evenly spaced, running parallel,
row after row."

What a child needed to learn when begging,

"Let me mow the yard!"

First try and there were weaving cuts in the grass that turned
the front yard into a meandering pattern of confusion -

When hearing, "Focus on a marker ahead of you and then keep every
cut in line with the first one."

the boy mowed a few passes and then quit.

It was hot, he was tired, and besides, some friends came by
and invited him to go to the pool.

"Focus!" was followed with the parent's,

"Stick with mowing until you are finished!"

Jesus' Gospel charge carried from a first-century agricultural setting to
our twenty-first-century urban farming: "Focus!" and

"Stick with what you are doing until the job is done!" – with
the "job changing from a field to a yard or a garden plot,
to what Jesus called "the kingdom of God."

As summer's heat and the invitation of friends made a pool

a good reason for the boy to stop mowing.

For us, as Christians, working in the labors of everyday life, and the
church, which the Apostle Paul called "God's field."

it's hard work, that can overcome us with despair and anger,
and we want to quit,

especially in the church where so many are NOT with
us in worship, and others are not committing to hold to
their Baptismal -Confirmation vows.

It seems so many are forgetting last Sunday's reading from Paul's
letter to the Ephesians had us hearing:

*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed
yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, ...
no longer slave or free, no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

So many who are forgetting, that Christ's focus on Jerusalem with His
crucifixion, was His path that led on to His resurrection and ascension,
to which He raises our focus to see beyond our despair and
anger, to see the "fields" of today's "urban farmers."

For some the "plow" may be a steering wheel of a car working the
field of Rt. 422 or the Expressway or turnpike or interstate.

For children and teens, the "plow" may be the implement used
to work the "field" of their sport.

Each, with focus fixed on Jesus, holding to living, driving, working,
playing a life that works to yield "the seeds of the Spirit,"
named in today's letter to the Ephesians.

"Urban farmers" for whom we, in worship, and through written and
electronic messages, do the work of letting them know we are praying
for them,

that they may have the strength to balance all the pressures in
their life,

and that wherever they are, they "Urban farmers,"

who now work with today's implements.

500 years ago, the Gutenberg press was the "plow" used to cast and
plant the printed seeds of the Gospel everywhere.

Now we can give those who are taken away from worshiping with us:

- web site addresses for daily devotionals and readings of
the lessons we are hearing; and our church's webpage with a
weekly sermon;
- along with sing-along CD's for families to play as they travel

and hear songs that carry the words of the Bible and teach what it means to be followers of Jesus,

- and virtual visits with missionaries and the places where they are serving, that become an online emersion in the life and faith of Christians all around the world.

Now, those who are caught in the bind of schedules, can use a cell phone, iPad, or laptop,

urban farmers who, at the same time, hold to two UNCHANGING commitments:

One, to use the church's "plow" forged from the Bible, and the worship and sacraments to cut row, row after row, to plant the seeds of new life in Christ in the soil of people's lives.

Two: to live as citizen of God's kingdom, doing "Urban farming" in these challenging, exciting times, wherever we happen to be in the world that is "God's field."

Again my memory takes me back to the hills of Hereford and Camp Mensch Mill, and the last night when we walked to an opposite hill in the woods and sat around a campfire for the closing service of worship.

There, each of us cast a small stick into the fire as an act of giving our life to Christ, totally and completely, and often sang a song with this story behind it:

In the 1870's many missionaries came from England and Germany to North-East India to spread the Gospel.

Naturally, they were not welcomed.

One Welsh missionary succeeded in converting a man, his wife, and two children. This man's faith proved contagious and many villagers began to accept Christianity.

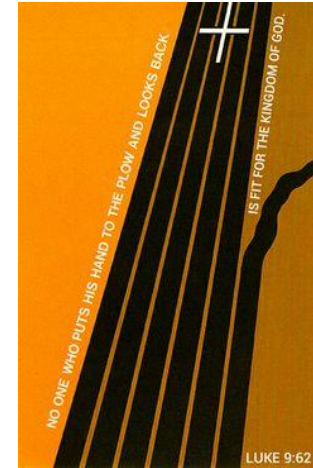
In anger, the chief summoned all the villagers and called the family who had converted, to renounce their faith in public or face execution.

Moved by the Holy Spirit, the man instantly composed a song set to one of their tunes, the same camp song we sang and still sing:

"I have decided to follow Jesus.

No turning back, no turning back." -Dr. P.P. Job

God hold our hands to the plow and fix our eyes on Jesus! AMEN!



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Fourth Sunday after Pentecost,
June 26, 2022

St. John's Lutheran Church,
Phoenixville, PA
Rev. Dr. Martha B. Kriebel,
Supply Pastor