

The Harvest of Our Righteousness

(Some thoughts with Dr. Joel M. Crichlow)

I am writing this a few days after one of the worst natural disasters in modern US history visited the Gulf Coast. The utter devastation in New Orleans in the wake of hurricane Katrina and the breach of the levees has left many in deep agony: with loss of family, friends, homes, pets, neighborhoods. We watched on TV, in horror, at the flooded roads and homes, demolished structures, bridges washed away and helpless souls on rooftops waiting to be rescued.

This very unfortunate circumstance has created many opportunities for people to perform an act of righteousness: give cheerfully to help the needy. Many will therefore be reaping the harvest of this righteousness. Those who are receiving the gifts will reap as well as those who are giving.

We reap what we sow, Galatians 6:7. Sometimes we reap directly – there is no intervening person or event between our sowing and reaping. For example I do something kind for Joe then in time Joe returns the favor. At other times we reap indirectly – the result takes a winding path through intermediary persons and events before it gets to us. That is, my action sets off a chain of events that touches several people before I am touched in return. Sometimes the reaping is quick, and at other times it takes a very long time before we get the fruit.

Some may find themselves trying to identify what were the seeds that were planted in order to have produced the harvest of the New Orleans disaster. Whatever those seeds are, we are sure that all of us have been involved, directly or indirectly, in their sowing. Therefore, but for God's mercies, none of us is exempt from reaping an unpleasant harvest. However, any such thoughts are at this moment being choked by the overwhelming outpouring of goodwill as millions plant seeds of righteousness. People are giving money, food, clothing, other basic supplies, homes, their time, their prayers, their hearts.

Undoubtedly these righteous acts will produce many positive results: the rebuilding of lives, the restoration of hope, the correction of inefficient systems, the improvement of social structures and inter-relationships. In addition there will be many intangible results. Maybe attitudes and perspectives will change. Some people will think differently about themselves and the things that they possess.

I cannot help but reflect on the following scriptural references:

“Righteousness exalts a nation”, Proverbs 14:34 (NIV).

The righteous acts prompted by the disaster will produce good fruit, which fruit can have effects throughout the nation.

“Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days”, Ecclesiastes 11:1 (NKJV).

Sometimes the situation may seem hopeless. There before you is the vast expanse of the water. There too are the seagulls and other creatures waiting to gobble up that piece of bread. But do not be daunted. That piece of bread may not come back to you directly. But a chain of events can be generated to cause a blessing to you in the future.

“Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy”, Psalm 126: 5 (NIV).

At times it is a really hard grind. You are buffeted by disappointment, pain or sorrow: your disappointment, your pain, your sorrow or that of someone else.

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up”, Galatians 6: 9 (NIV).

“... the one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward”, Proverbs 11: 18 (NIV).

“God loves a cheerful giver”, 2 Corinthians 9: 7 (NIV).

God *“... will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness”*, 2 Corinthians 9: 10 (NIV).

This should leave one then in a spirit of anticipation as one looks to the future for the harvest of this outpouring of righteous deeds.

However, we know that these acts of giving will not be sustained. Many who have given or are giving in response to this tragedy may not give again in a hurry; thus removing the possibility for further positive reaping. Since we are basically selfish we often choose what we think is the shortest path to serving ourselves. Such thinking and actions often lead to a harvest that can be described as ugly, cruel and hostile.

Would it not be much better if we were all habitual doers of good deeds; sowing seeds of righteousness? This requires a transformation in our thinking, a renewal of our minds; and this is something that Jesus Christ has promised to do in us:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5: 17 (NIV).

How about giving Jesus a chance in our lives? Then we can look forward to a continual sowing and harvest of righteousness.