

Best not done alone

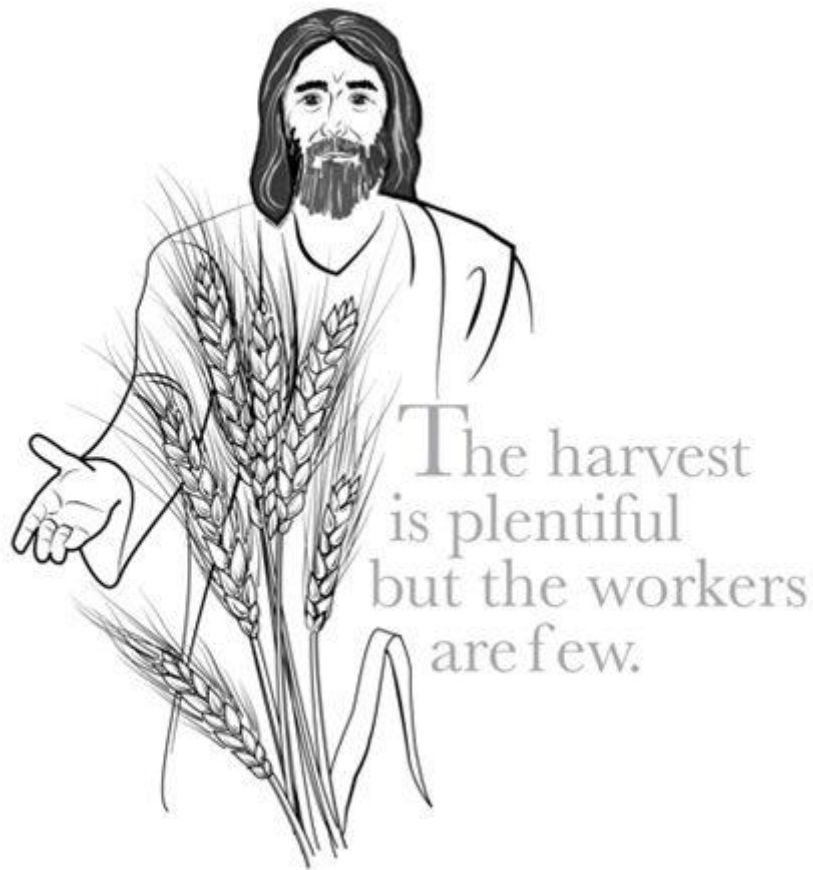
There are some things in life that just can't be done by one person alone. Can you think of any?

Make a list of things that are best done by yourself and another list of things best done with others.

Best done by myself	Best done with others

Tug of war is one. Marriage is another. You can't have a deep conversation by yourself. It's impossible to hug alone. You can't even offer a simple, friendly handshake if there's no one on the other end of your hand. Yes, it's true. No matter how strong our wishes or desires are, there are some things in life (perhaps more things than we care to acknowledge) that just aren't meant to be done by one person alone.

Try seesawing by yourself. A funny movie is even funnier when it's shared with someone else. And dinner at a restaurant tastes a lot better and is a lot more enjoyable when there's someone else sitting at the table with you. It seems that it's not God's plan for some things to be experienced or done alone. Take the work of ministry. Ministering in Jesus' name isn't meant to be a solo activity. Which, of course, is why God created, and to this day is still creating, church communities like ours: groups of people serving the Lord together, working in unison and doing their part as individual members of the Body of Christ.



When Jesus was conducting his earthly ministry, he discovered that the work of sharing the Good News of God's kingdom was something best not done by himself. Even if it was possible for him to do that, at some point in time Jesus came to realize that doing it without help was impractical and inefficient. There were better, much more effective ways to share the Word and make sure it continued to be shared. And one of those ways was to add recruits, other helpers.

Matthew's Gospel described how Jesus perceived the hurt and brokenness around him. In the cities, towns and villages he travelled to, everywhere he looked, our Lord encountered people who yearned to hear a message of hope; who wanted the healing presence of God to come into their lives; who needed care and compassion.

Jesus' reaction probably wasn't any different than our own reaction to how fragmented and wounded the world is today. Watch the news on TV, scan the Internet or read the front page of any newspaper and we can't help but think, "I knew things in the world were bad, but this bad?" Although we may try to convince ourselves otherwise, the world hasn't changed much since Jesus' day. In fact, a strong argument could be made that things have been on a downward slide from then to now. Our world, like the world Jesus inhabited, contains so much heartache and heartbreak that at times it can be overwhelming. People everywhere—including here in our own great nation, the richest and most prosperous nation that ever existed, are living in pain, fear and despair; and we know that, as individuals, the little we might be able to do to help make things better is just a drop in the bucket.

When Jesus began to mix and mingle with the crowds the way he did in our reading from Matthew this morning, he recognized how desperation and misery had overtaken many people's lives. He saw countless people who were, as Matthew put it, "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Maybe that was the moment when Jesus realized he couldn't adequately address all this pain, despair and need by himself. And even if he put his small band of twelve disciples to work, it wouldn't be enough to get the job done. So Jesus did more than just tell his disciples to help him; he also urged them to pray for God to send many more workers into the field to assist in the great harvest of proclaiming good news to needy, hurting people. Jesus knew full well that his task was great; which is why he decided that the work God had sent him into the world to do was something best not done alone.

During those early days of Jesus' ministry, he came to understand that it was unreasonable and unrealistic to go about proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God by himself. Not only would it take longer than necessary to spread the Gospel, but he would have greater success if that message was also shared by his followers: those who had taken his message to heart and wanted to carry it forward.

If Jesus had decided to proclaim the Gospel alone, without any help, then when he died that message could very well have died with him. Jesus must have understood—instinctively if nothing else—that the kind of substantial change and social transformation he had in mind was most likely to happen and continue when ordinary people became enthusiastic advocates for it. For Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God to become a reality, everyday people, moved by the Spirit of God, first had to be convinced that the teachings and principles of the Kingdom truly mattered and would make a real difference in the world. And those people would be the ones to share it and embody it. If Jesus' message was to take root and continue to spread, it needed to be proclaimed by more voices than just his. That's why he prayed and worked so diligently to enlist others in helping him accomplish the Kingdom building mission he was on. And, as I'm sure you realize, it was from this recruitment of other workers to go into the harvest field and work to build up God's realm that the church sprung up.

The church is a community of labourers working together in the field (the world) to bring in God's harvest. And the "harvest" is anyone who hasn't already heard or responded to Jesus' call to believe in him and follow him. So, what is the end result that you and I and all Christians are being called to strive toward? What was the ultimate purpose Jesus wanted to see come about?