

Good morning. Do you know what is going to happen right after worship? Right! The Annual Meeting. I'm eager to learn more about the ways that you have Glorified God, Made Disciples, and Filled Human Needs during the past year. I'm even more eager to hear the preview of coming attractions---the excitement of new ministries and the joy of continuing ministries that touch lives. Annual Meetings are one of the opportunities a church family has to pause and celebrate God's amazing work in your midst..... You'll discover anew that you are a congregation that is alive, vibrant, and eager to move into God's calling.

But annual meetings also remind us that it's good to take stock of our personal ministry and growth during the past year.... And to recommit ourselves to becoming even more Christ-like in the year to come.

I love the passage from Hebrew 12 ...because it reminds us that we are not alone. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have shown us the way to a transformed life....and who now cheer us on from their heavenly seats....encouraging us to run the race....

To grow day by day....

To commit ourselves to a deepening relationship with our Lord and Savior.

Who are those witnesses? Scripture is filled with their names....

Peter the impulsive fisherman who became the outstanding member of the 12; called to be the Rock, upon whom the church was built.

Lydia...the seller of purple who was converted by Paul and provided hospitality to that great missionary...who had the greatest transformation story recorded in the New Testament. From fire-breathing murderer to un-stoppable disciple. Peter, Lydia, Paul.... In fact, you could easily add names to that list.... Your pew partners may not be mentioned in the Bible, but they're members of the cloud! .... And those who founded and sustained Reedurban are in that list. Each set apart for God's purposes.

As you know, God is The One who worked in each of their lives ... calling them, equipping them, and empowering them for ministry. But, the saints who have come before us did not idly sit by. Instead they were actively engaged in their relationship with God.

So, we turn to today's curious Scripture....it's about leaving margins..  
Listen for the Word of God in this Old Testament passage....

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time to pick up the grapes that have fallen.“

At its heart, this Scripture ...it's about love...loving our neighbors, especially those who are constantly hungry. Boaz, who literally left room in the margins of his fields so that the hungry could glean there....and one of those was Ruth, a direct descendent of our Savior.

I live in the Southeast corner of Akron, where the city landscapes quickly turn into farm land. Don Peel, doesn't live far from us! On an especially energetic day, I could easily walk to several corn fields.

So, last fall, when I was meditating on this passage, I drove by those fields to see if they harvest the Old Testament way....leaving the margins for the poor.

Here's what I have discovered.

Huge combines prowl over the field, stripping the corn stacks bare. The fields end within six feet of the road.... And I was amazed to see that they harvested the stalks right up to the edge. The stubble that was left behind didn't have a hint of nourishment... hardly a kernel in sight!!

Now I will be the first to admit that we live in an entirely different world....we usually don't see gleaners in our fields. Who knows, perhaps half of this crop was destined for the food bank....where modern day gleaners may find their sustenance.

**But the words of this Scripture and these images can become a modern day parable for anyone who yearns to be more like Christ and To glorify him.... To make disciples.... To continue meeting human needs.**

**It invites us to ask, “Do you leave room on the margins of your life? Do you leave space so that you can feast on God's Word? So you can meditate on His mighty acts?”**

The reality is that we live in a white-water world....one that moves, and moves, and moves. It's easy for us to end up with calendars booked full, back-to-back meetings. Days when we fall in bed exhausted..... Leaving no room in the margins to glean from God's Word.

Do any of you recognize the name Bobby Bowden? He was a foot ball coach at Florida State University when a player name Kevin Long played there. Kevin remembers one of Bowden's favorite stories....

“Bowden was playing college baseball, and he had never hit a home run. Finally he hit one down the right-field line, into the corner. He rounds first and looks to the third-base coach. He turned at second, was halfway to third and the coach was still waving him on. He got to home, he hit the plate. He had his first home run. He was so excited and everybody was slapping him five. Then the pitcher took the ball, threw to the first baseman, and the umpire called him out. Coach Bowden said, ‘If you don't take care of first base, it doesn't matter what you do.’” (*More Perfect Illustrations, Tyndale Press, p. 219*)

First base .... Glorify God! Immerse yourself in His word. Study. Pray. Become part of a small group that makes room in the margins for Bible study. If you don't take care of first base.... You may miss second....

**“Do you leave room on the margins of your life so that you can be available to those who don't know Jesus Christ as their Savior? Do you leave room to mentor others who are on the journey? Do you leave room for those in need? Whether it's the hungry, the blind, the lost, or the lame?”**

An amazing story of the power of transformed lives has been shared by members of The American Red Cross...once, as they were gathering supplies, medicine, food, and clothing for the suffering people of Biafra, a box showed up with this note inside.

“We have recently been converted and because of our conversion we want to try to help. We won't ever need these again. Can you use them for something?” Inside the box were several Ku Klux Klan sheets.... The Red Cross cut them into strips and used them to bandage the wounds of black persons in Africa.

From darkness to light....the dirty rags of our old selves transformed into the

gleaming likeness of God...holy people, radiating his light into a world of darkness.

Can you hear the stories each of the great cloud of witnesses whispers to you? Do you hear God's voice calling? Come, make even more room in the margins of your life so you may more fully follow Christ. Allow God's Spirit to lead and guide you to  
...those who hunger and thirst for God's word.  
...to those in need.

Who knows... through your holy life.... You may encourage Peter or Paul to be....You may feed someone like Ruth or walk with a fellow Christian ....  
All for the glory of God.