

MARLAN, THE PLANTING OF THE LORD  
Isaiah 61:3, 10-11; Marlan Anders Funeral; April 14, 2018

The calendar says it is spring, the time of year farmers need to go out into their fields to get them ready for planting. But our eyes say that it is still winter, and we see few signs that spring is actually on its way. I don't know how farmers are able to endure the vagaries of the weather. It's too dry so we pray for rain, and then it rains so much the fields are under water. It's so hot that everything is burning up in the fields, and then an early frost strikes before the crops are mature. How can farmers put up with the uncertainties of their vocation? The answer to that is faith in God. Of the farmers I have been privileged to get to know, all of them put their faith in God. God is in charge, God is always good, and God will provide. It takes great faith to let go and admit that we are not in control, and trust that God will come through on His promises to take care of us.

Marlan was a farmer. You could say that he didn't have a choice, being born into it. And when his father was injured and needed help on the farm, after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Marlan quit school to do just that. It was on the Anders farm that he and Nola raised a family. He stayed there in retirement and after her death. One of the hardest things for him was accepting that his poor health these last few years meant he could not stay in his home on the farm.

Throughout the Bible, God's work of salvation is put in farming terms. Jesus told a variety of parables comparing His kingdom to various aspects of farming – we heard one today in the parable of the wheat and the tares/weeds. God's people are often described as something He planted and grew. In our Old Testament Reading from Isaiah 61, it states: **That they may be called... the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified... For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.** Jesus described Himself this way: **Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit** (Jn 12:24) Jesus died and was planted in the grave to bear the fruit of life. On Easter we celebrated that He rose from the dead and those who die with Christ will follow Him to life by rising from the dead.

Marlan had the reputation of being a man of few words but had a mind that was always working on something. He had an eye for possibilities, seeing in things what others did not or could not. Who else would have thought that the Northrop Depot could become a Fox Lake cabin? Farming in the days before genetically modified seeds that aren't killed by herbicides, he knew what it meant to "walk beans" to chop out the weeds. There had to be a better way to do the job, so he invented and built an early "bean rider." I've never "walked beans," but I have to think that "riding" is better than "walking" in this case. His idea was good enough that an implement manufacturer produced a version based on his design. Having solved the problem of walking beans, Marlan didn't see a need to patent his design.

When God's Word speaks of His work in terms of farming, God's goal is always the same as any farmer: to produce a harvest. Marlan was a **planting of the Lord**, so God's goal was that he sprout and grow up and produce a harvest of righteousness. God's method of farming was for Marlan to die to sin as an infant with Jesus in Baptism and rise a new man to live forever. His Christian parents did what faithful parents do and brought the two-week-old infant to be baptized, and then continued to bring him to church faithfully as he grew up. So he was Confirmed shortly before his 14<sup>th</sup> birthday and continued as a faithful member of this congregation for the rest of his life.

Something that Carmen pointed out to me is that Pastor Zemke, who was both the baptizing and confirming pastor, had trouble spelling Marlan's name correctly, misspelling it on both his Baptismal and Confirmation certificates. Apparently Pastor Zemke had a passion for deep sea fishing and spelled Marlan's name as if he were the fish with a similar sounding name.

But a spelling mistake by a pastor on certificates does not negate Marlan's name being written in God's Book of Life in heaven. On the Last Day when Jesus returns with His angels to gather in the harvest, Marlan's raised body will be separated from the unbelievers, as harvested wheat is separated from the weeds. The wheat of believers will be gathered into God's kingdom and shine like the sun, but the unbelievers will be gathered to be burned in the furnace of hell.

Some people, when facing their deaths and knowing that God's judgment is coming, fear that day, both the physical dying and the judging by God. It will be horrible time for those without faith and whose sins will be held against them. There is no such thing as a "good death" and facing God's judgment based on His justice according to the law and not the Gospel.

That is not how Marlan faced his coming death and standing before God. In the last conversation I was able to have with him last week I asked him about him dying. He was having one of his "good days" and it was hard to believe that he was dying just by looking at him, but he was. He knew his body was failing and there was nothing he and any of us could do about it. Marlan was at peace with that. He confessed his faith in God who would save him from death and raise him to life again. His confidence was not in what kind of man he was in his life but in the kind of God he had and the death and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ, for him.

If we compare that to how he saw the world around in his last days, we can see that he was the same Marlan as always – looking at things and trying to make them better. He had moved into the hospice room at the nursing home, which has a refrigerator, which sat on a low shelf and that bothered him. It needed another shelf under it to make it better accessible to those using it. At his insistence, someone in the family put in the shelf – I think without asking.

This reflects the faith of a farmer. You work at the things you can control, the work that can be done, the things that will help others and contribute toward the harvest. But you put your faith in God to do what only He can do. Today we give thanks for what God did for Marlan in his life in this world, for taking his soul to heaven, and the day that Christ will return and raise his body from the dead in glory to shine like the sun in God's presence.

Believe it or not, it springtime, the time for planting. Marlan is the planting of the Lord. Because Jesus died, was planted in the earth, and rose, those who have died with Him will rise with Him. The single Seed Christ will bear much fruit at the Day of harvest, which includes Marlan. Amen.