

Step VI

In which the people ask Piers to guide them to Truth. He agrees, once he has made his will and plowed his field. Those who help will share in the harvest, and he allocates tasks appropriately, but idlers refuse to work, even when threatened with the law. So Piers summons Hunger, who deprives everyone, but when the harvest is gathered, the idlers return to their old ways.

Then people complained that the path was too hard
Without following advice every foot from a guide.

“By Saint Peter of Rome,” said Piers the Plowman,
“Hard by the highway I’ve half an acre.

5 As soon as I’ve plowed and sown it with seed
I’m willing to walk with you, showing the way.”

“That’s a long delay,” said a lady in a veil.

“What work should we women be doing meanwhile?”

10 “Some can mend sacks,” Piers said, “for the wheat,
While lovely ladies with long refined fingers
Who have silk and sendal and time to sew them,¹
Make chasubles for chaplains to honor their churches,
And workaday wives and widows and their daughters
Spin flax and wool, the weft and the warp
15 Of coarser cloth, to cover and clothe
The needy and naked, as Truth intends.
And unless the land fails, I’ll provide them with food
Out of love for the Lord for as long as I live,
While the folk who need food and drink to survive
20 Shall in fairness help to furnish that food.”

¹Sendal probably means linen here, although it can also be a thin silk.