

Luke 10:-11, 16-20

¹After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ ”

¹⁶“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

¹⁷The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” ¹⁸He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Luke 10:-11, 16-20, 2016

After really studying this passage I have begun to regret that I closed my sermon series based on coming, hearing and acting last week.

This really seems like the final step, other than the fact that in the series I was pointing to what Jesus showed us one is like who comes to him, hears his words and acts on them.

In this gospel lesson Jesus quits showing and sends His followers off to do what He has shown them.

In the process he makes a couple of points about the going that we can learn from.

The first thing we observe is that Jesus sent his followers out in pairs

and to every place he intended to go.

The mission of Jesus was very deliberate. The way Jesus did things was not random or without purpose.

Jesus knows full well how difficult this mission is, not just because He knows it leads to his death,

but because he knows there will be people who will not accept what He brings or sends them.

He knows this is a life that can leave one discouraged and dispirited.

For one who is engaged in their faith and community this work can leave them disillusioned and bring them to the point of wanting to give up.

Most of you know what it is like to need and to have someone, a friend, a colleague, someone who cares enough about you to listen, to be objective and insightful,

to love you in the midst of your difficult times.

This work cannot be done alone. It requires that kind of partnership, those companions, it requires a community.

This work requires partnerships and companions for another reason as well. As I said a moment ago, Jesus gave specific instructions to go to certain places;

“..every town and place where he intended to go as he travels to Jerusalem.”

We have talked about this a great deal here. It is in the community and through the community of faith that we are able to discern where it is Jesus is sending us.

We have been through those discernment processes before, even and perhaps especially in your congregational discernment about calling a pastor 5 years ago.

My discernment was not done alone either. I reached out to others to help.

The question was where is Jesus sending us now?

That is what our conversation last Sunday afternoon was about.

That is what much of our conversation is going to be about in the months to come as we discern and understand the specifics of our future evangelism and outreach efforts.

We have these conversations because it takes all of us together to understand and discern where Jesus is sending us.

This is contrary to the prevailing attitudes of our culture.

There is an overall unwillingness to be dependent on others,

and we live in this illusion of independence that only serves to isolate and give credence to the idea that we don't need one another or God.

In the end we value things over people and our insecurities grow,

and in times of real need then we don't have the capacity to have a real relationship that gives life and encouragement.

There are few things more satisfying and life giving than sharing with others, giving of our abundance and receiving in our need.

David Lose, President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, talks about a group of church people who joined together in an experiment to change their life style for the good of Jesus' mission and to give more to others.

They agreed that over a 6 month period of time they would buy only what they needed

and nothing of what they wanted beyond that.

Along the way they experienced and had to deal with the temptation to buy other things.

But they also experienced an increase in their abundance and what they had to give others.

This exercise was very difficult. The other thing they discovered was that they couldn't do it alone.

They needed each other for encouragement and accountability.

They needed to know they weren't alone.

We too need one another too.

The next thing Jesus shows us comes in his words,

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...”

Jesus saw a world in need of his love and grace and put the need, as he does so often, in agricultural terms;

in terms of the harvest.

I get a little nervous when Jesus does this because I am reminded of a day some years ago when a teenager told me she didn't understand what I was talking about when in the gospel lesson Jesus used a yoke as a metaphor to teach a lesson.

The only yoke she knew about was the yoke of an egg.

Obviously I didn't do a very good job of translating and that didn't work well for her.

Our younger generations all too often have no clue about farm life or farm equipment.

So, Jesus is letting us know that there is, or is going to be, plenty of ripe crops to gather,

or plenty of people who are waiting, longing for, needing what he has to offer,

and there are few to go out into the world and gather them together and make sure they have it.

But he sends 70, not 700 or 7,000, but 70.

These are likely the ones who, after Jesus' resurrection, go out into the world to preach and teach the gospel, heal the sick and proclaim the kingdom of God has come near.

And their descendants will continue their work, building hospitals, orphanages,

refugee centers and all kinds of institutions to touch the lives of people around them.

It began with 70 who had the faith and the courage to go out and change the world.

Lose also reports that the average worshiping attendance of ELCA congregations is 70.

It is likely about the same for other main line traditions as well,

so I don't think all hope is lost for the church in our day and time.

In fact, I would conclude the church has a good start,

and for us given our average worshiping attendance of 128 reported for last year, we should have a very good start.

Lose also states that there are now 600 full time pastorates vacant in the ELCA,

and that number is expected to grow to 1,000 by 2020.

The laborers are becoming fewer and fewer at some level it would seem.

This raises the question for our young people today who struggle with what they are supposed to do with their life,

What is Jesus calling you to? Where is Jesus sending you? Are you one being called into the ministry?

What you have heard so far about carrying out the mission of Jesus is the hard work, the sacrifice and discouragement. But there is another side to this.

In the closing of this passage we get to hear about the return of the 70, and I think what we read there is important for today.

“The seventy returned with joy, saying Lord in your name even the demons submit to us!”

Jesus says to them, “Never the less, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

The 70 obviously experience joy and success in their work.

We have, and will also.

But I believe it is important to recognize that that joy does not always come in the success.

Success is not a requirement for joy in carrying out Jesus' mission.

What I believe is necessary is faithfulness to Jesus' sending;

Joy comes in the going, in the working, in the new relationships, in the healing of others, in giving the comfort,

in proclaiming the kingdom of God has come near while we have sat with someone in need.

The joy is in going where you are sent and doing what Jesus has sent you to do.

How many times have you said, or heard someone else say,

“I get more out of working at the shelter, or going on the mission trip or doing whatever mission, than I could ever give.”

There is the joy.

Jesus says what you really need to rejoice is that your name is written in heaven.

And it is.

And this makes a difference because it sets you free to be with the other one, to help the other one,

to give yourself to Jesus' mission.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and we will travel with him each week in our gospel lessons.

Along the way he will teach us many things about life, ministry and his love for us

so we may be able to grasp just a small part of the power of his sacrifice that gives you grace, hope and life.