

JUST GO

First Presbyterian Church of Kissimmee, Florida

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Luke 10:1-11 (NRSV)

After 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. [2] He 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. [3] Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. [4] Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. [5] Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' [6] And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. [7] Remain 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. [8] Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; [9] cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' [10] But 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.'

Luke 10:16-20 (NRSV)

"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

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

WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH

A young preacher went to his first church ... a tiny congregation in rural Georgia. When he arrived, he encountered a padlock and chain on the front door of the church. The keys he had been given didn't open the lock.

He waited for a lay leader in the congregation to arrive. When he came, the pastor asked the leader if he had the key to the lock. The leader replied, "Nope. That lock belongs to the sheriff."

"The lock belongs to the sheriff?"

"Yes sir, a few weeks ago things got out of hand at the Board Meeting. Folks started pulling up the pews they had given. In turn some others started ripping up the carpet they had donated. So the sheriff came out here and put that lock on the door until you could get here and get things back together."

You would hope that somebody made that story up. But, unfortunately it's all too true. And even when things don't get that bad, this story is symbolic of how many churches and many people operate. The doors to our churches and our hearts are locked as we wait for some Messiah to come.

In this case the church was waiting for a young minister to come and work miracles. But, there are many other "messiahs" for whom people wait. Perhaps a young man or woman is waiting for that special someone to come into their lives and make everything right. Perhaps we're waiting to land that perfect job or buy that wonderful home. Perhaps we're looking forward to retirement.

The point is this; our messianic expectations take many forms. That is, everyone has their hopes for the future. There are things that we put on hold as we wait for that perfect moment or that perfect person to appear.

When the Messiah comes ... then we'll take the locks off the door and get to down to business.

THE MESSIAH HAS COME AND SENDS US

And so with all our planning and expectations for the future, we sometimes seem to forget that the Messiah has already come. God was in Christ. And the Messiah didn't tell us to padlock our churches and hearts against the troubles of the world until the second coming.

On the contrary, Jesus invites us to open up and go out. Just as he sent the 70 ahead of him long ago because the "harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" so he sends us today.

There is no indication that those first disciples were particularly prepared to do this job. Their only credential was that they were called. But, Jesus sent them out anyway.

They were, as the Scripture put it, like "lambs among wolves". And in this case the lambs score a victory over the wolves! These lambs are given the power to do the work of Jesus. They rebuked the demons and healed the sick.

And so they were overjoyed when they reported back to Jesus. Even Jesus seems impressed by their report. He said that this campaign gives a foretaste of that coming kingdom when the power of Satan will fall forever. If it were a baseball game we would score it Lambs 1 and Wolves 0.

But, the game is not over ... not by a long shot. The Empire will strike back and that lamb named Jesus will be surrounded by bloodthirsty wolves who will take their revenge. Make no mistake about it. The opposition will be deadly.

Jesus announces the coming of new world and sends his messengers out to give everyone a taste of what it will be like. But, those who loved and profited from the old world will howl in protest and rage. And they will crucify the Lamb of God.

But, we know how the story will end. Even as the wolves of the world howled in glee around a cruel cross, they were dancing around the sign of their ultimate defeat.

The cross would soon be empty, and the Spirit of the risen Christ would be set loose in the world where he will be much more powerful than he was before. As he commissions others to do his work, people the world over come to know Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Today the work of Jesus is spread all across the world because he continues to call others to go out in his name. We, you and I, are called this day to go in the name of Christ. We prepare the way for Jesus to come into the hearts and lives of many more people. It is our job to take the padlocks off of our hearts and our churches and reach out to a wider world. It is our job to extend the ministry of Christ.

We are like modern day Elijahs who herald the coming of the Messiah; we make a straight path in the wilderness so that people can return home to the Promised Land. 2,000 years later the world is still being challenged and renewed by the power and love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

And, believe it or not, we are the ones who have been charged to make it happen.

So, if that is our call, how do we do that?

What can this passage teach us about being a faith disciple of Jesus today?

JUST GO

Well, first it teaches us to just go. I have found this to be a key concept in the exercise of ministry. Don't think about it too much. Just go, trusting in the power of Christ to bring a word of healing and hope.

There is something about the Christian faith that must be lived in order to be understood. The truth about Jesus cannot be understood by just listening to and studying his words.

You understand what it means to follow Jesus as you do something, as you go and visit the sick or comfort the bereaved. The Christian faith is best understood as you serve food to the less fortunate or stand up for peace and justice.

In order to really understand Jesus you must find a way to go in response to his call.

This past week I talked with a minister who took some of his young people on a trip to Nicaragua. He was a bit hesitant about making such a journey with a group of 14 high school students.

But, he also wanted them to understand what it was like to do some hands on international mission. So, despite his misgivings he went.

I asked him how it went, and he said,

“It was life changing. The young people couldn't believe that folks who had so little could be so happy.”

Before leaving the country the young people decided to do something special for their hosts. They prepared a meal and served it to the Nicaraguan young people who had worked so hard with them.

This was a totally new experience for the Nicaraguan youth, and the pastor said that every one of them had tears in their eyes as they served them the meal.

Those young people were changed by that trip, but the first step was finding the courage to go. I think that this is often the biggest hurdle for us as well.

God might be calling us to go in his name, but we don't want to take the chance. We always have more preparations to make and bags to pack. Next year we'll respond to God's call, but now we have to get ready to do the job.

Barbara Brown Taylor told of speaking with a recent college graduate who wanted to be ordained. She said that he was bright, committed and articulate, but as he talked she became perplexed.

He didn't want to serve a church. He didn't think that he would like being held accountable by a denominational body. He was not attracted to the ministry of the sacraments, but he did think that he would like to preach once a month or so.

Finally, she asked him, “Then why do you want to be ordained?”

He thought for a while and said,

“For the identity, I guess. So I could sit down next to someone on a bus who looked troubled and ask them how they were without them thinking I’m trying to hustle them.

So I could walk up to someone on the street and do the same thing. So I could be up front about what I believe, in public as well as private.

So I would have the credentials to be the kind of Christian that I want to be.”

Barbara said that his “honesty was both disarming and disheartening. God help the church if clergy are the only Christians with the ‘credentials,’ and God help all those troubled people on the bus if they have to wait for an ordained person to come along before anyone speaks to them.”

I’ve found that many people think like this young man. They think that because they don’t have the training or the credentials to help that its best that they stay on the sidelines until an expert can arrive and provide the proper answer or the appropriate help.

But, it seems to me that the 70 Jesus sent out to prepare the way for him didn’t have much training or preparation or understanding. They didn’t have the credentials to do the job.

Even the inner circle, the 12 disciples who were with him all the time didn’t seem to understand what Jesus was all about. They are portrayed in the gospels as a bumbling, self-serving and fearful lot. What assurance do we have that the 70 would be any better? No assurance at all.

The emphasis would not be upon what they could do and what they brought to the situation. The emphasis would be upon what God could do through them.

TRAVEL LIGHT

That’s why Jesus instructed them to travel light. If you want to travel for Jesus you have to forget the excess baggage! Jesus told them to carry no purse, no bag, and no sandals.

Their job of preparing the way for Jesus was an urgent one. They were charged to travel light so they could focus on bringing the message instead of lugging baggage.

I think it would be appropriate to ask those who would be Jesus’ disciples today what excess baggage keeps us from going and doing what Jesus would have us do.

Are we worried too much about the purse, about raising enough money to get the job done? Are we worried too much about creating large buildings and complex organizations?

When we look at the history of the church we see that the message of Jesus has often been hindered by the baggage of the institutional church. Instead of going in the name of Jesus and trusting Jesus to give us what we need for the journey, we have trusted in our own ability to plan and control.

When that happens, the results have often been disastrous. Our desire to have a full purse and a well stocked bag has led us to compromise with the world and give a distorted version of the gospel. Throughout history, because

people have insisted on this excess baggage, the faith has been used as a way to consolidate political power. The faith has been used to justify policies that have hurt the very people that Jesus calls us to serve.

The way to get around that problem is to travel light. Don't trust in your own ability or the power of earthly structures. Trust in the power of God's Spirit. Travel light.

SHAKE THE DUST

I think it's interesting to note that there was one group which Jesus did not require the 70 to preach to ... the group that did not welcome the message. Jesus told the disciples that when they encountered opposition that they were to shake the dust off their feet and move on.

This was a sign of judgment upon those who didn't accept what they had to say. But, more than that, I think that it was a practical way of helping the disciples rid themselves of some excess spiritual baggage. As they were required to travel light physically, they were also required to travel light spiritually.

Just as they were not to be anxious about their physical needs they were not to be anxious about what others thought of them. There would be opposition to their message. Those who were committed to the old world would not welcome the announcement of that new world that Jesus was bringing.

But, that was not something for the 70 to worry about. They were to bring the message that Jesus was coming and in Jesus the kingdom of God is near. They were to preach that message and move on. The results were up to God.

Sometimes it's hard to believe that the kingdom of God is near. When we look at the morning newspaper, it's hard to shake the dust off our feet and move on. It looks like the forces of evil are winning at every turn.

Wars rage on. Terrorists continue their bombing in the name of their so-called god. In many places the plight of the poor seems more hopeless than ever. The message and ministry of Jesus seem long ago and far away.

Suppose the messengers of God came knocking on our door today as they came long ago ... traveling light with no food and no money?

Would we believe their message that the kingdom of God was near? Would we even let them in? We might be tempted to just tell them to leave us alone.

But, if Jesus teaches us anything, he teaches us that appearances can be deceiving. Even when our hopes are crucified, and it looks like evil has the upper hand, the kingdom of God is near. It comes near not in the arrogance of power but in the power of service. The kingdom of God comes near when people share their resources and their lives.

I think that's why Jesus required the disciples to travel light. He wanted them to share their life with others. He was forcing them to be dependent upon the hospitality of others. And it was in this hospitality, this sharing of meals and lives that the kingdom of God came near. It was in this weakness that the power of the gospel became apparent.

DAX

A seminary student told of his experience on a mission trip to Peru. In a small town near the Amazon River a 14 year old boy named Dax helped his mother sell homemade flour tortillas. On a good day they make enough to afford the bus fare back home and have a little left over to buy some flour for the evening meal.

The student took a special liking to Dax. They played soccer together one day when Dax was supposed to be at school and the student was supposed to be painting the church building. They kept each other's secret.

Dax taught the student new words in Spanish, and they often spent time together drawing pictures that Dax would hang on the wall in his home.

The student wrote,

"Then, just as it was time for me to leave with my group, Dax ran to the other room. He emerged a moment later with a fresh, large, flour tortilla in his hand.

Dax broke the tortilla and handed me one-half. We sat down and ate together, he with the proud look of a generous host, I with tears welling up in my eyes."

Dax was surrounded by the wolves of hunger, illness, poverty, oppression. Come to think of it, Dax had about as much as those first missionaries did. Dax was near the Kingdom of God. And I was near Dax."

LIFE CHANGING

The kingdom of God comes near in many ways ... in the generosity of a 14 year old boy, in the gratitude of a sick friend for a timely visit, in a meal prepared by a loving family.

Don't think that you have to be someone special to proclaim the kingdom of God. You just have to be willing to get your hands dirty and your heart changed. You just have to be willing to drop everything and go when he calls.

You might go half way around the world or you might just go down the street. It doesn't matter how far you go. It just matters that you go in the name of Jesus.

I liked the way my friend described the experience of his youth group, life changing.

Like those first disciples if we find the courage to go in the name of Jesus we will return home full of joy, and our life will be changed as well.

It's quite amazing what God can do through a willing disciple. Sometimes through the smallest act of ministry we will get just a glimpse, just an inkling of that kingdom that comes near in Jesus.

But, sometimes just a glimpse is enough to change everything. Sometimes just a glimpse is enough to give us hope for this life and the life to come. (Luke 10:20)

I charge you today to leave behind your excess baggage and just go in the name of Christ. Do something, anything in his name today. It will have more effect than you think.

In our ministry to the world Jesus sees more than we see. He sees the power of evil losing its grip, and he sees the joy of salvation entering into the most unlikely of places.

His ministry continues to expand when disciples have the courage to say yes. So, I encourage you this day to say yes. When he calls, drop everything and go. After all, the kingdom of God is near.

Amen.

(Dr. Allen welcomes your comments on his sermons, or on the website: Please email:
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