

Luke 10:1 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 “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

Luke 10:17 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.”

SENT

Do you know which denomination had the most members in colonial America? Not the Baptists ... not the Methodists ... but the Presbyterians.

Unfortunately, that soon changed.

The Baptists and the Methodists were more successful on the frontier. Why? Their organization was more suited to the conditions that existed in the Wild West.

The Presbyterians insisted on seminary-trained clergy, and that meant sending young men across the ocean to go to school. In the Presbyterian Church there was a shortage of ministers and that meant the Presbyterians couldn't take advantage of new mission fields.

But, the polity of the Baptists and the Methodists allowed them to ordain gifted laymen to preach on the frontier. They would farm during the week and preach on Sunday. Soon there were more Methodists and Baptists than Presbyterians.

I wonder if this bit of history might teach us a lesson. Even today the churches that are growing have found a way to increase their outreach beyond the professional clergy. How can we do that? How can we empower people for mission?

Jesus said that the fields are ready for harvest. And having said that he ordained 70 to preach, teach and heal in his name. As far as I can tell there was very little training. He just sent them out like “sheep among wolves.”

They had no resources. In fact Jesus told them not to take a purse or even sandals. They would rely totally upon the hospitality of the people.

It looked like a formula for disaster.
And yet they succeeded ...wildly.

Jesus called twelve, and then he called seventy. And he sent them to do much the same work that he does.

In this passage we learn that Jesus is the great delegator. He calls ordinary people like you and me to do his work in the world.

In fact the word mission means sent. To be in mission with Christ is to be sent, authorized to bear his message to the world and commissioned to perform his work in the world.

Do you remember what Jesus told his disciples before he ascended into heaven? “I want you to get some real estate. Build some large buildings and put my name on them.”

He didn't say that?

Maybe this is what he said, “I just want you all to settle in here. This is a beautiful spot for a retreat. You've been through a traumatic experience. Just breathe deeply and think about the noble teachings that I have given you.”

He didn't say that either?

Oh now I remember. He said something like, “Go. Get out of here. I am sending you into the whole world. Teach, heal and baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

That's what Jesus told those first disciples. And that's what Jesus tells us as well. “Go. I'm with you. Trust in me.”

When we think of mission we think of getting on a plane and going to some faraway place of need.

But, that's not it. Mission means that we are where we are and we're doing what we are doing because we have been sent. We believe that life has a purpose. More specifically we believe that our life has a purpose. God in Christ has called us.

That is a revolutionary concept. Life is not just one thing after another. Life has meaning.

CHOOSING THE ORDINARY

But, I've found that we have a hard time believing that. And we come up with excuses.

"I don't have the training. I'm too shy. Surely you've got the wrong person, Lord. I'm very, very ordinary. You need somebody extraordinary to do your work."

Do you really think that God hasn't heard those excuses before? Think about the stories in the Bible of the people that God chose to go and do His will.

God chose Abraham to be the father of a great nation. And Abraham said, "I'm too old." And God said, "That's okay. A little time in the nursery will make you feel young again. By the way, your elderly wife is going to have child."

When God chose Moses, Moses said, "I'm not a good public speaker. Maybe you better choose someone else." And God replied, "That's okay. I made your mouth. I'll give you the words to say."

God called Isaiah to be his prophet and Isaiah said, "I'm not worthy. I'm a sinner in a land of sinners." And God said, "That's okay. Let me touch your lips with this hot coal. There, all clean. Now, whom shall I send with my message?"

And Isaiah heard himself saying, "Send me."

When God chose the prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah said, "I'm too young." And God said, "Before you were born I had plans for you. You're never too young if I'm on your side. God anyway."

The people that Jesus chose weren't all that special either. Jesus chose James and John, the Sons of Thunder full of judgment and the itch for personal political gain. Jesus chose Simon Peter who always had something to say even when he didn't have something to say.

After the resurrection Paul described the church at Corinth in this way, "Not many of you were wise. Not many of you were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose you, the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong."

The prophets of old and the disciples of the early church seem pretty ordinary to me, even less than ordinary. And yet God chose them. God sent them into the world to carry His message.

The power obviously did not come from the people. The power came from God and the call of Christ. I think that's why Jesus instructed the 70 he called to give up what little power and security they had.

Jesus said, "Yes, it will be like sending lambs among wolves, but I'm going to send you anyway. And I want you to travel light. Forget money. Forget packing a heavy bag. Forget even about taking sandals. Just go. I'll provide for you."

MINISTRY WITHOUT A SAFETY NET

That seems like pretty poor advice for young ministers just starting on the road to ministry. I would probably say something just the opposite. I would say,

"Get a bank account. Don't let the balance get too low. Establish your credit; there will be a time when you will need to make installment purchases.

Wear nice shoes; people notice those things. And whatever you do, be friendly to everyone."

That might be the advice I would give. But, that was not Jesus' advice. He advocated ministry without a safety net.

This is the essence of discipleship.

We do not have to be the best and brightest. But, we do have to leave everything behind and go where Jesus tells us to go.

Christ doesn't call us to be what we're not. We can be the same old ordinary people we've always been. But, Christ does call us to drop everything and go in his name.

In the Bible we read about many who couldn't follow Jesus because other things were more important. Some couldn't leave their family. Some couldn't leave their job. Some couldn't leave their money.

There were many who couldn't follow Jesus because they couldn't leave behind the religious traditions of the past.

But, for those who were willing to leave the old way of life behind, no matter how ordinary they were, Jesus was able to use them.

HANDLING REJECTION

Probably the biggest reason many of us do not follow Jesus is that we are afraid of rejection. We are still like sheep among wolves in the world. And the Christian message is often ridiculed and rejected. What do we do when that happens?

Notice what Jesus did not require the 70 to do. They did not have to stay where they were not wanted.

They were called to preach and heal in the name of Jesus. But, if they were rejected, they didn't have to stay. Jesus told the disciples to shake the dust off their feet and move on.

I think this is important. How many people are bogged down by rejection? It keeps us from going in the name of Christ, and it is bad for us from a mental standpoint. We are stuck in one place because we cannot get over the rejection of others.

As we noted last week, Jesus calls us to move on.

Just as the disciples were required to travel light physically, they were also required to travel light spiritually. They were to have no more anxiety about what others thought about them just as they were to have no anxiety about their physical needs.

The results are up to God ... and not to us. Rejection will occur. Move on. Leave those who reject the message in God's hands. The fields are still ready for harvest. We are only called to go and proclaim.

Don't worry. Just go.

Many of the problems in the church today are due to worry about things that don't matter that much. And that anxiety paralyzes us. Instead of going and doing we sit and stew.

A RADICAL CALL

The 70 did go, and like the prophets of old they found that God did indeed provide for their needs. But, more than that, they discovered that they went with authority and power.

When Jesus asked them to give their report they excitedly told him with great joy, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us." And Jesus replied, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning."

I wonder. What demons might submit to us if only we have the courage to take our faith on the road? What demons might submit to us if we had the courage to leave the familiar and the comfortable behind and go where God calls us to go?

Might Jesus even see the fall of Satan in what we do?
It's hard to imagine.

Think about Jesus calling 70 of us today.

We're milling around in the coffee hour before church, and Jesus steps into the middle of the room and says, "Excuse me, can I have everyone's attention. I need 70 volunteers for a service project. This will be a great chance to go into strange and dangerous neighborhoods and invite yourselves into people's homes.

It will be like defenseless lambs sent out alone into the midst of ravenous wolves. And please remember not to bring anything that would make it easier or safer or more comfortable for you to do that. Okay?

So, just come on over here and sign up."

Do you think we would have any takers? Not likely.

Many of us organize our lives around what we want to do. We are busy with our work and striving for promotion, with playing golf, with socializing, with paying the bills and hauling the kids to soccer.

We aren't evil. We're just busy. We're pretty much booked.

And then we come to God and say, "I have five minutes and five dollars left over. I want to be a Christian. God I'll give you what I have left."

But, giving what we have left over is never enough. The call to discipleship is still a radical call.

Like the 70 we must learn to say,
"God, its all yours. It's all up for grabs. Take my life, all of it. Take my possessions. Take my wealth. I hold back nothing. And I will go where you call me to go."

How does the hymn go? I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.

That's discipleship.
It sounds horrible. And yet it might be exactly what we need.

I talked to a man who served in the army during World War II. He was a paratrooper and jumped on D Day. He talked of the horror of war. He was close to death on many occasions. He said that in combat you had to believe that you were dead already and were just trying to take as many of the enemy with as you could.

But, then he said,

"Still I look back on those four years as good years. For once in my life I was part of something bigger than myself. I was on the move. We had a mission.

Maybe its sad to say, but I look back on those years as the best of my life."

This is why we go on mission with Jesus.

We are called to be a part of something bigger than our little lives. The only way to truly live is to find something worth dying for.

Do you believe this morning's Gospel? I do.

You and others like you have taught me the truth of Jesus' promise. I have seen you encountering great difficulty in your daily discipleship. Sometimes you really did seem like sheep in the midst of wolves.

You have been rejected. You have had to admit failure on more than one occasion and move on to other things.

And yet I've seen you do some extraordinary things in the name of Christ.

God has a purpose for our lives. And the great adventure of life is discovering each day where Jesus is going to send us.

God give us the courage to go.

Amen.