

The Sending of the Seventy

Luke 10:1-3

From the Pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

July 3rd, 2022

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Luke 10:1-3 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.

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In our text today, Jesus sends out seventy followers (or seventy-two, the various texts are unclear) "ahead" of him "to every town and place where he himself intended to go." The message Jesus commissions these followers to share is clear; it's in verse 9: "Proclaim the kingdom of God has come near to you."

This text, naturally, invites us to ask about our own missionary journey. Which of "every town and place" does God want us to go? And while we know what our message is, how do we share it?

That's what I want to explore briefly today, and I want to end with a picture that really says it better than my words ever could. I'll end with the picture.

70: Seventy (or seventy-two) followers are sent on this mission. Most people think the number 70 is simply meant to convey a big number. Others link the number 70 to the listing of the nations in Genesis 10; seventy are identified. If this is the case, Luke is making clear symbolically that Jesus' word is for the entire world, every nation.

The prayer Brandi Lowe discovered for us and sang today makes mention of the people Jesus cares about. Not every single group is mentioned, but a lot of groups who are often overlooked are mentioned. She prayed for the sad and confused, the stuck and abused, those at the end-of-their-rope, the worn out and broke. Jesus wants them to be at peace, to know that the kin-dom of God is near to them, even them, especially them. Brandi prayed today for the anxious, depressed, and unseen; the workers, the hungry, the houseless, the lonely and recently spouseless; the queers and their closeted peers, the bullied who hold in their tears; the addicts, ashamed, and hung over.

Seventy disciples are sent out to "every town and place" . . . to the calloused, the wisened, the sober of every nation, every tribe, every land . . . to everyone ready to listen. *Love them in my name. The kin-dom of God has come near. Share with them this amazing peace.*

We are sent on a journey into the world to love everybody.

PAIRS: Jesus sends them out in pairs. We don't know why. The Twelve disciples didn't go out in two's earlier in Luke (9:1-6), but they are going out in pairs here. They go out in two's in Mark's gospel and later in the Book of Acts. The Mormons do it. The Mosaic law specified that "two witnesses were required for a testimony to be credible." Maybe Jesus had Moses in mind when he sent his followers out two by two, maybe not. (I don't think Jesus had the Mormons in mind, buy *who knows?*).

Regardless the reason, there is some comfort in taking on this assignment with a partner. Two people can support one another, two people care share the load, two people can pace one another. *Where two*

or more are gathered in my name, I am there among them (Matt. 18:20). (Now, I'm borrowing from Matthew's gospel here, but I can't imagine taking on such a calling without Jesus with me—and people like *you*.)

We are called to go. Let's go together.

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD: Jesus instructs these followers to go "on ahead of [Jesus] in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go." They are going to places that Jesus will go to himself. There can be no doubt in Luke's gospel that the disciples are *not* the main attraction. Jesus is. That's important to keep in mind.

DANGER: You are like lambs being sent into a wilderness of wolves. There is always the possibility of danger. In every rose garden, there are thorns—and that is putting things mildly. Don't be surprised by danger. Don't be dismayed by danger. Don't be slowed down by danger.

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I see you going out into the world. I see you answering Jesus' call. I see you quietly doing the work of disciples, bringing peace, breaking bread, writing checks, having conversations, helping others, making calls, cooking food, sending cards, paying visits. I see this—and while I'm sure we could do more and do better—I'm encouraged.

BRET'S PICTURE: Here's one picture that I think says a thousand words. With the picture comes a story.

My friend Bret Godfrey has been married to Deb for 30-something years. Deb's brother, Dave, is a South Dakota farmer. On June 1st, he had a bad heart attack while working cattle. He was rushed by ambulance to the local hospital in Aberdeen, stabilized, the helicoptered to Abbott Northwestern in Minneapolis, near where Bret and Deb live.

There were complications. It has been touch-and-go. He's been in a coma much of the time. Blood pressure problems. A blockage in his colon. Surgery. Dave's wife, Dixie, and three daughters have been staying with Bret and Deb. People have been bringing food. Prayers have been prayed. Candles have been lit.

People have surrounded this family with the peace of God, and with shepherd's pie and slow-cooked meals, and listening ears. These people have borne the peace of God to the family, to Dave, and their witness has gotten loose in the world. With and without words, people who care have been saying: *the kingdom of God has come near*. And this battered family and their extended family have felt that peace and been encouraged by that love.

These are the people Jesus calls us to see, to love, to heal.

This picture was taken last Friday. (A wide shot of 16 men standing on a mown hayfield in front of 12 large tractors and trucks.) Sixteen men and 12-tractors and trucks showed up to get Dave and Dixie's hay out of the field into barns. "The harvest is plentiful," Jesus said, "but the laborers are few." It's amazing what 16 men (and their families) can get done in one very long day. They came one-by-one, two-by-two, family-by-family.

Early last week, Dave took three unassisted steps. On Wednesday, he took sixty. On Thursday of this week, doctors expect to send Dave home.

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God has put healing in your hands to share with the world. SHARE IT!

Alleluia!

AMEN.