

Luke 10:1-11,16-20

When we think of Jesus' followers or the apostles we usually just think of the just twelve Disciples and Paul.

But this story speaks of seventy more who Jesus sent out. This was a kind of "internship," a training time while Jesus was still with many more of His followers.

And this mission is exactly the same as Jesus' own ministry was...of teaching and healing! And Jesus once again reiterates that the kingdom of God has come. Jesus sends them out ahead of him...sowing seeds of the kingdom of God.

At first Jesus' followers are Disciples...open, humble students learning from their Rabbi...Now they are to go out and practice what Jesus taught them...they have to walk the talk...the word apostle is now used and that word specifically means... one who is sent... so Jesus now changes their focus from students to now those who are sent, in Jesus' name, to practice in a real way what has been taught to them.

This concept has its roots in ancient Rabbinical teaching... the students would go out in the name of their Rabbi to spread the wisdom of their teacher to other Jewish Communities...But Jesus changes that model in that he sends his students to EVERY town and place.

He is now on his way to Jerusalem and will probably travel through villages where he has not been to before. Rumors of what Jesus is doing have undoubtedly spread so the seventy apostles will now announce his coming by giving people a preview of his work.

It is also a preview of the ministry Jesus gives us today and every Sunday. We go out "ahead of Him," bringing His message and God's grace wherever we go.

And they go out “in pairs.” For Safety, Encouragement, Witness and Connection... together. Whenever you have to do something dangerous or risky, or unknown you’re gonna want to have somebody by your side.

We’re in this together as followers of Jesus and two people will always complement one another and support one another while sharing in successes and failures...Christian Lone rangers usually tend to get themselves into trouble.

And the harvest is as plentiful today as it was in Jesus’ time.

In fact the fastest growing religious group today in America are the “nones”! And I don’t have to tell you that church attendance everywhere is down...and I don’t have to ask you where all the young folks are!

People today who feel a connection to something greater than themselves... will quickly tell you they are spiritual just not religious...

People want God but they may not want the baggage that goes along with our religion! And then there are also many “religious people” who never set foot in a church... the C&Es (we may see them at Christmas and Easter)...so WHY is this?

Well my own opinion on the subject goes back to the word apostle and also to the word church that Jesus uses.

The word Apostle means one who is sent and the word Church ecclesia is a call to action, a verb. So where is the direction of God? Of Jesus?

Does Jesus sit around and wait for everyone to come to Him? Or does Jesus take God out on the road? Out into the world...out into the kingdom of man so that they may brush up against the Kingdom of God!

When Jesus uses the word church it is right before he leaves for Jerusalem and it’s in Caesarea Philippi literally standing outside the gates of Hell (Hades in Greek). Jesus is taking God right into the Heart of ancient day Las Vegas to bring up this notion of Church.

It is an action... something that people do in community with other people...and somewhere along the line we have made church about the rules and the place and not about the people...the temple system died with Jesus and it's dying once again.

I love a visual that Rob Droste our Canon for Ministry development showed us once. He showed a graphic of a fish tank on a pier. Our movement is trying to get the fish into our beautiful, safe and cozy tank rather than be in the rough and fish-eat-fish sea...but how many fish actually jump out of the sea and choose to be in the tank? None!

Again God's word moves outward!

God is in here... but God is also out there... and we are sent from this place out there and into the world. You think the world could use more grace, forgiveness, kindness, joy and peace. The world won't find it here, but it will find it in you when you are out there in the world spreading God's grace.

These are the people Jesus sends out today...that's you!... to EVERY town and EVERY place where he himself intended to go...and that's EVERYWHERE!

And just like today Jesus warns us to expect resistance and rejection!

In fact more Christians are persecuted today than at any time in human history.

And in this country, you will be met by personal spirituality tailored to meet the needs of a specific individual...Jesus as YOUR personal savior...creating God in your image to look and think just like you... PSST ...and even some churches are guilty of this tailored form of Christianity.

And even worse than that we might also be met with apathy! If it doesn't meet my wants and needs, then I just don't really care! But Jesus is clear and sends out God's message of love, hope and healing

upon a broken and needy world - regardless of the reception or the outcome.

Notice how Jesus only tells them what they should do and doesn't say anything about measuring their success or the results.

If people don't accept your message, he says, shake it off and continue on.

In our Churches today it's difficult to avoid measuring success. We live with Annual Sunday attendance, Stewardship levels, Salaries and buildings and so on.

We measure our work by the data -- and that's how many people will measure our ministries -- but that's contrary to what Jesus is instructing His students here isn't it...We are not to worry about such things in spreading and living into the gospel.

Remember he told them the parable of the seed sower... and the seeds may fall on hard or thorny ground but Jesus sows those seeds wherever...regardless of the results... Jesus doesn't just plant seeds anyway in fertile prepared soil but rather everywhere...you never know...

Fling the Gospel all over the place... then let go...sometimes it results in nothing much... and other times the results are quite miraculous!

Just how small is a mustard seed, the mustard seed was a common metaphor in Palestine meaning the smallest thing and was actually a weed back...how innocuous was this guy called Jesus snuffed out in just three years of ministry by the powerful Roman Empire...how small were his ragtag group of followers that were scattered all over after his death...how insignificant such a small thing was...then I ponder other small things...how small is an atom before it collides with another, how small is a cancer cell or a virus...What potential impact do these seemingly small things contain within them...anyone here ever hear of COVID?

And as Paul reminds us this morning remember as you sow, so shall you reap! If you plant an acorn don't expect to get a maple tree. If you plant a tomato seed don't expect any peppers...

If you plant seeds of discontent don't expect peace... if you plant prejudice don't expect acceptance...don't plant hatred and violence if you expect respect and love to grow...if you really want something in your life you must first sow the correct seeds. As you sow, so shall you reap! It can't be any other way... it would literally be unnatural!

As apostles of Jesus Christ we must show others what the kingdom looks like... by sowing the seeds of Christ regardless of the outcome. Seeds of Kindness, of Love, of Compassion, of Forgiveness, so that these seeds will bear God's fruit in the world. Through the Gospel shared ...and lived...The Kingdom of God can become a reality to be experienced today.

And we are to sow those seeds Everywhere! And just like a weed you never know where they may take hold, grow and then spread!

Verses 12-15 are unfortunately omitted from today's reading. The verses which follow are:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. This is where Jesus lived his life by the way...in and around those three villages... yet they probably ignored Jesus' teachings and all the seeds He was sowing.

And Tyre and Sidon were where the Samaritans lived... to the Jews these were the unfaithful ...and here Jesus is meeting more resistance in His own backyard than in enemy territory.

To bring it home sometimes the places that are least open to Jesus' teachings can be right inside the church itself. Jesus' harshest words throughout all the Gospels are always aimed at those who should "KNOW BETTER"...And Jesus holds them accountable... in particular the Pharisees (Me) and His own Disciples (You).

To follow Jesus means to mirror Jesus' ministry to the world!

And like the ancient Rabbinical model... the students eventually can do what their Rabbi can do...Peter actually does walk on water...Peter and Paul do raise people from the dead...the apostles all cast out demons and heal...they all bring about the kingdom of God come near.

Even Jesus tells His disciples later on that you will do greater things than these...and they do! Is there a note of surprise in the report these 70 Apostles bring back to Jesus? Isn't that because they didn't know or expect what would happen?

Why are we surprised in our own ministries then or in the miracles that happen all around us?

Yet we are not to rejoice about our successes... because that would lead to us believing in our own power...rather we should just act as a conduit of God's Grace in the world...and the best part is that we never ever need to worry about the results!

Rejoice that your names are written in heaven... that is, that we have now become part the kingdom of God come near.

St. Teresa of Avila's well-known saying reminds us that we continue to carry on the ministry that Jesus sent us OUT there in the world to continue. First as humble students – disciples...to learn here...and now as those who are sent...out there – Jesus' own apostles!

She says it like this:

Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good.

Yours are the hands through which He blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are His body.....Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

So go in peace to love and serve Everyone...Everywhere... sowing the seeds of God's Kingdom... in Jesus' name! Amen!