

## **Sending and Receiving**

Luke 10:1-11, 17-20

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Our Scripture reading for today comes from the gospel according to Luke, and it is classic Luke. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus sending the twelve disciples out to cast out demons, cure diseases, and proclaim the kingdom of God (Luke 9:1-6), but only Luke tells of Jesus sending out seventy of his followers. Why the extra story in Luke? Well, Luke has a consistent interest in both the Gospel and in Acts to communicate that the good news is not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles and finally for the whole world. Remember, it is Luke who traces Jesus' genealogy back not just to Abraham, but all the way to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). It is Luke's resurrected Jesus who tells his followers to be his witnesses Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Seventy is a significant number for Luke and for careful scholars of the Scriptures. You see, way back in Genesis 10, right after the great flood, the Bible lists all the descendants of Noah who settled the earth as widely as it was known back then. Do you know how many descendants of Noah are listed in Genesis? You guessed it, seventy. Seventy signifies all the nations of the earth. Here in the early parts of Jesus ministry, Luke is already foreshadowing the spread of the good news beyond the bounds of Israel.

In the immediate account, the seventy go out according to Jesus' instructions and then return with rejoicing that their mission has met some degree of success. If that is the end of the story, then we can thank the seventy for their hard work, wrap up our worship service, and get on with the important stuff of Sunday like golfing or boating. However, if we believe the Bible offers more than simply an account of what happened long ago, then we must find ourselves participating somehow in this story of sending and receiving. We must listen to understand where and how Jesus is sending us to go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

Then and now, Jesus offers clear instructions. Where are we to go? Jesus says to go to every town and place where he himself is about to go. As Luke as already made clear, that is every town and every place. The good news is for all people. Where are we to go? To Haiti and Kenya and Mexico, certainly. But we are also called to go to St. Helena Island, Dataw Island, Burton, and Lady's Island. There's no getting off the hook because you are not called to overseas missions. You do not need a bracelet to help you answer the question "Where would Jesus go?" Are there people there in need of good news? Then Jesus would go there.

Jesus also gives these seventy and us clear instructions on how we should go. All of them will not come naturally to us. Some will even challenge our cultural and social values. First, Jesus tells us to go in pairs. Our kingdom mission is not a solo mission. Stark independence is not the way of the kingdom. We go with someone else: someone to share in the decision making, someone to hold us accountable, someone to help carry the load. I can think of no better example

in our own community than the dear sisters Sheila and Stella who are retiring this week after 26 years of service at the Franciscan Center on St. Helena Island. The two women have been serving as a pair for over 34 years.<sup>1</sup> There is no parting ways over difference of strategies. There is no unilateral decision making. Proclaiming the kingdom is a shared mission.

Second, and perhaps most difficult for us middle-class Christians, Jesus tells us to go with next to nothing. “Take no purse, no bag, no sandals” (10:4). I will tell you, I did not carry out this instruction very faithfully on my vacation last week. I think my bag weighed 35 pounds! Jesus also instructs the seventy and us to rely on the hospitality of strangers for room and board. He reminds his disciples that they should be satisfied with whatever food and drink is provided and not look around town for the most comfortable room and tastiest provisions. It is a way of life that is best described as “simplicity,” and for those who discover it is almost always accompanied by a profound sense of freedom.

But it is not a way of life that comes naturally to most of us. I learned from my parents to want a “better life” than the one they had. In many ways, I have had it. I have never known hunger, as my dad did when his father abandoned the family. I have had the financial support of my parents as I pursued higher education, something neither of my parents had. The social expectations is, of course, that this better life is also reflected in the house I occupy, the car I drive, and the bag I carry. While having the “right” house, car, or bag are not so important to me, I’ll be honest, I take some comfort in having a house to live in, a car to drive, and a bag to carry. The call of Jesus to go with nothing and rely on the kindness of strangers pushes hard against my values of self-reliance and personal responsibility. Perhaps more importantly, Jesus words give me pause to reflect on just how deeply I trust God to provide for me.

As much as I might like to write these instructions off as impractical or explain them away as one of those things we do not have to take literally, I cannot do it. These were extremely practical and literal instructions then, and so I – and we – must continue to wrestle with them now. Are we willing to live a more simple life if doing so helps other experience the kingdom of God? Could we ourselves even experience the kingdom of God more fully if we were not so distracted by our homes and bags and sandals? I’ll leave you to mull over these thoughts later, because Jesus still has one more instruction for us, his heralds.

The third instruction Jesus gives to the seventy and us is to go in a spirit of peace. Whenever you enter a house, proclaim peace upon it. We could spend another sermon or two exploring the biblical meaning of this word “peace.” If you have some appreciation for the significance of the Hebrew word “shalom” then you are on the right track. I think we capture the spirit when we exchange the peace of Christ with one another during worship. In this one word we find connotations of forgiveness, justice, grace, comfort. The instruction implies that those who go already live in peace – with themselves, with their neighbors, and with God. Our going is the opportunity to share the peace we have already experienced with an ever-broadening circle.

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<sup>1</sup> Erin Moody. “Hope and a Smile: After 26 years, Sisters Sheila, Stella leave indelible mark on Lowcountry.” *Island Packet*, 29 June 2013. <<http://www.islandpacket.com/2013/06/29/2561433/hope-and-a-smile-after-26-years.html>>

Go everywhere. Go together. Go simply. Go with peace.

All of these instructions are bookended by a reminder: God is the Lord of the harvest. Do not rejoice in your success; rejoice that your names are written in heaven. As one who belongs to Christ, your place in the family of God is secure. You are already a recipient of God's grace, due in no part to any work of your own. Your mission – your call – is to live your life rooted in this relationship everywhere you go so that you might prepare others to receive it, too.

The final instruction that Jesus gave his disciples was the same whether they were welcomed or rejected. "Tell them," Jesus said, "the kingdom of God has come near to you." If we go according to Jesus' instructions – together, simply, peaceably – we are bringing the kingdom of God with us! That is a big claim. Let that sink in a minute. Anywhere and everywhere we go, if we go together, if we go simply, and if we go peaceably, we are bringing the kingdom of God with us! We are the bearers of God's kingdom!

It is not ours to worry about who will or will not receive the kingdom when it is in their midst. God is the Lord of the harvest. Our success (for the kingdom or otherwise) do not define or qualify us. We rejoice because our names are written in heaven. How can we do anything but go and share the good news?

Go everywhere. Go together. Go simply. Go in peace. Amen.