

**Sermon**  
**McCarter Presbyterian Church**  
**4th Sunday after Pentecost**  
July 7, 2019

**Old Testament Lesson**

Isaiah 61:1-3

**NT Lesson and Subject of Sermon**

Luke 10:1-11

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. 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. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 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. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘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.’”

**Heading Out: God’s Kingdom Comes**

Let’s consider that you are at home. The doorbell rings. The two people at the door stand with smiles and offer a **warm greeting**. They want to know if you are engaged in church or attend **worship** at this time. You respond with a bland, non-committal reply. After all, it has been a few weeks since you attended worship. No one has called from the church office to ask if there is a problem, because most people you know who are active in the church attend about twice a month.

The newly found **friends at the door** ask if they can come in and share some information that you will find very interesting. Again, you politely decline, wondering if a foot is going to thrust into the doorway and block closing it, the way that **brush salesman** did when you were growing up. However, the two kind people say that they understand and present you with some printed materials, asking if they might **call again**. Finally, you tell them that you are very happy as a member of Downtown Community Church of the Savior, and they nod in glad approval, turn and go back up to the street, talking to each other about their **next stop**.

Well, I relate this to you, because if you live in an apartment complex these folks are **not permitted** onto the grounds. Younger folks may not have had a visit from anyone calling at their door to promote their congregation, faith, or even their **political viewpoint** for the upcoming election. While this is no longer common, the technique of going door-to-door certainly is. It is a lot like a good salesperson. They make “cold calls” whether in person or on the phone, knowing that only seven out of 100 calls will be interested in what they have to say; that only 4 or 5 will schedule a visit; and, that only 2 or 3 will make a purchase of what they are selling. If you are an **introvert** or “thin-skinned,” then this type of job sounds like a nightmare! And, that is how I felt for years.

Now, make no mistake: I have had training and have performed sales, just as many of you have. I have sold newspapers, wrapping paper, Christmas cards, and financial services over the course of my life. I never went door-to-door for a political candidate, and never solicited anyone to attend my home congregation. And yet, this is **exactly what Jesus is asking** these 70 followers to do.

Maybe, Jesus was fortunate, and all seventy of them were **extroverts**- full of life, loving to engage with people about nearly anything, and delighting in **conversation**. Most of us know people like that, and they make up the larger portion of any sales force. And yet, the further I have gone in my ministry, from application to seminary and for ordination as a pastor through my first year serving a church, this lifelong introvert before you has found it easier and easier to **engage with people** about something that causes me no distress: **faith** and **ministry**. In fact it brings me great joy to hear about the welfare and **experiences** of others. This is the type of **transformation** that is possible when we recognize that **God** has become the major focus of our lives and of our **living**. And, I am not alone in this: It is common among seminary students, pastors, and the **leadership** of nearly every congregation.

This type of change had to be part of the experience of these **harbingers**, these 70 representatives of the **ministry of Jesus**. And, the setting is familiar to us. Last week, our scripture and sermon centered on Jesus sending out the **Twelve Disciples** to do pretty much the same thing that we are taking up this morning. The writer of *Luke* wants us to recognize that the 70 are continuing the role of **John the Baptist** earlier in the Gospel story, telling others that Jesus has come and that the **kingdom of God** is not only near, but has arrived (*Luke 3*)! We get no details on the these 70, or 72 depending on the source, but apparently they have been around with Jesus and the Twelve Disciples long enough to learn from him. From the text, Jesus is confident to send them out **on their own**.

So, now we have to ask ourselves: **Why** is Jesus taking this on at this particular time? What is the **urgency**? Well, Jesus was using an image that was commonly known to those in Galilee, Samaria, and the rest of Palestine. He framed this new task around the many factors of **harvest** time. Most of us are pretty far removed from **farming**, but I will tell you that the harvest is an **urgent time**, no matter what the crop. Conditions must be dry enough for grain or seed to be stored. Otherwise, it will sprout or rot. Leaving it in the field leaves the harvest exposed to damage from rain and hail and poachers wanting the grain for themselves.

Those hearing these words of Jesus know that **additional workers** were always needed at harvest time. And, here are the 70 fulfilling that role of **spreading God's Word** to those in Palestine throughout nearby Galilee and Samaria. In our scripture lesson, Jesus wanted to **proclaim** his message to the entire region, and this is urgent, because he is **headed to Jerusalem** where great challenges await him and the disciples. Jesus and the Twelve need **helpers**, and those elected for this are receiving detailed instructions from Jesus in this scripture.

This theme of the **harvest** is important throughout the *Bible*. It is familiar to those who know their Old Testament among us. Jesus and the crowds around him also would have known that **the prophets** used the image of the harvest to describe **great events** that would or might happen (*Joel 3, Micah 4*). These words of the prophets meant that **great changes** were at hand, and that the people of Israel would be gathered together, as well. So, right away the writer of *Luke* wants us to know that there is urgency and **deep meaning** in this mission.

In addition, this time of preparation and sending very likely reflects aspects of the **early church**: sending out believers as proclaimers of the **Good News**. This intentional calling on villages and homes likely is the key to **the spread of the Gospel** throughout the world of Rome. And, the focus on individual homes confirms what we know: The meetings of those early believers for worship, scripture, hymns, and prayer took place in private homes. This transition from the the local synagogues to **homes** is urgent, also, where many of the Jewish leaders, rejected these new followers of Christ, whether they were Jews or Gentiles (That is, you and me.).

The sense of urgency goes along with the instructions for **outfitting the Seventy**: Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. These **evangelists** for Jesus were totally **dependent** on those whom they met and greeted in the towns and villages. While we are scratching our heads at how harsh this sounds, we should remind ourselves that hospitality was common among those in Palestine, and the survival of most travelers depended on individuals **accepting a stranger** into their home. Of course, this does not sit well with us today, with our concern for the welfare and safety of ourselves and our loved ones; but, it was the **common practice** of the day and persists in many areas of Africa and among most Islamic cultures.

In addition, these same areas of Palestine, North Africa, and modern Syria, Iran, and Iraq would understand the offer of "**Peace**," a typical greeting in the culture of the time of Jesus and today. The peace is offered, and if rejected it is **not lost** on those who receive it. This allows the individuals to confidently proceed to the **next house** or the next town. When the evangelists find an **agreeable household**, they take residence there. They offer their **Peace**, heal the sick, and proclaim the message of the **Kingdom of God**.

Now, we have to understand that all three of these elements are "**game-changers**." The Seventy are not charging for their services, only **accepting what is offered**. They are not looking for personal gain or fame, but offering goodwill and a **revelation from Jesus** who will soon follow with more Good News, more healing, and more blessings for those who are willing to receive it.

These 70, in pairs, offer 35 simultaneous offerings of **proclamation**. The kingdom of God has come near! Even if those they approach do not accept the message, the word and the reality of the proclamation and blessing, it is real and present with or without **their belief**. The writer of this gospel wants us to know that his is the **power of God** in the world. It is the power of **faith** to discern, to learn, to trust, and to **live** according to the **will of God** into this new aspect of faith and **living**: the **kingdom of God**.

This particular story, the commissioning of so large a number, is only recorded in *Luke*. Jesus knows that the message of **hope and transformation** must be told, not only by him, but by these unremarkable people who are doing an **extraordinary** mission. Today, we can understand that the kingdom of God was the new reality, perhaps the “New Normal,” as we hear today. But, Jesus and the disciples, and now these Seventy, know that it is much, much more: It is **salvation, healing** from within: a **new outlook** on the world and on our own lives and in our **living**.

The **commission** to these 70 followers was not an easy one. Much about living a life **in Christ** remains difficult today, because we as **believers** and followers of God in Christ are often at odds with the so-called “norms” of society, especially in terms of honesty, justice, and the welfare of others. Just as today, Jesus knew that the disciples would meet **resistance and rejection**. But, Jesus told the disciples to **persevere**: to shake their dust from their feet. He speaks to us in the same way, as if to say, “Stay with it.” This is the best work that we could possibly do for **Christ** and for the Kingdom of God.

In spreading the **Word** about the **kingdom of God**, this scripture lesson shows us that the followers of Jesus were heading out into **unknown territory**, declaring that God’s kingdom had come. This had bold implications for the **ministry of Jesus** and the disciples, and very likely helped to spread his **Good News** to a much broader area, as they traveled toward Jerusalem and the somber setting of events which we know as **Holy Week**.

This story remains important to us, because it is **Good News**, and it is the core of the **Gospel message**. Granted, few pastors would recommend a door-to-door campaign for evangelism, but the reality is that this often works in a tight community, or where the congregation is no longer involved with the community around it. Indeed, there are more subtle ways to bring about face-to-face communication: **Hosting** public events, **feeding** those in the area around our congregation, especially those in need, and **working** alongside those who are not in the congregation at local mission projects away from the church campus, such as a house-build with Habitat for Humanity, or volunteering at Triune Mercy Center here in Greenville (SC).

The truth is that the church **rarely articulates** or states its **mission** today. This began a long time ago, as congregations grew and deemed themselves successful. Each denomination developed charitable branches for mission as well as significant **institutions**: hospitals, orphanages, and schools both in North America and far abroad. These were key to promoting the welfare of believers and entire communities. Even today, we still accomplish a lot through our national entities, such as Presbyterian Disaster Agency, which stays for years in communities that are rebuilding after natural disasters.

But, the changing conditions of our communities in which we live are forcing us to **rethink** our teaching about the Gospel’s story and **mission**. And, mission remains highly important, just as Jesus points out in our Word today. “The harvest is plentiful.” There is **more work** to do than laborers to do it.

Fortunately for all of us, this story points out that the **work of the church** is not merely the calling of a select few, or mailing in our check. It needs prayer, dedication, compassion, devotion, vision, mercy, humility, and faith. Believers can contribute to this in their own way, helping to form and informing their own spiritual journey.

So, today where do you and I find ourselves in relation to **God's kingdom**? Are we able to **proclaim it** in what we say? More importantly, do we proclaim the kingdom in our actions, our **choices**, our greetings for friend and stranger, our **love for others**?

Like the Seventy, do we have the faith to go out and offer **Christ's peace** and to proclaim that the **Kingdom of God** not only is near, but **has come**?

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