

Our Mission  
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Luke 10: 1-11; 16-20  
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So here we are in vacation season! Have you ever gone on a trip with a young child? It is amazing how much you need to take with you! I remember when we once took our 2 month old camping—well, that was followed by a 10 year hiatus from camping! Food, diapers, seats, swing, crib, toys, all of those *just in case* items and clothing for any type of weather. Whew! That’s a lot to lug around!

Look around at any airport. We drag so much around with us! My sister thinks that wheeled suitcases are one of the best inventions of the twenty-first century, and if you have ever seen her at the airport, you know why.

We are people lugging a lot of stuff around, aren’t we? Baggage, in more ways than one! Contrast that with the typical Jewish person of Jesus’ day. He or she usually wore five articles of clothing: two tunics (one inner and one outer garment), a waistband belt or girdle of some sort, a head covering, and sandals. He or she might carry a traveling bag for food and money which was slung over the shoulder. They did not take a minivan full of suitcases or coolers packed full of supplies. They traveled much lighter than most of us would dream of. But when Jesus called the seventy and sent them out, he told them to leave even their lighter luggage behind. He wanted them to focus on their mission of spreading the good news without being distracted by whatever baggage they were carrying.

Why is it that we think we are going to need so much? Does having our stuff with us give us a sense of security? Does it help us to feel prepared? Do we grow so accustomed to it that we are uncomfortable leaving it behind? Whatever our reasons for packing the way that we do, it is true that on the spiritual journey, and in the challenges we will face on that journey, God supplies what we need.

Let’s look at Jesus’ commissioning for the seventy. This story is from early in Jesus’ ministry and he is teaching his followers about mission work. I believe it is not just a story about *them*, it is also the story of *our* appointment as followers of Christ. It is about each and every one of our calls to mission for Christ. Jesus is very clear. He tells them where he wants them to go and what he wants them to say. It sounds like a kind of Discipleship 101 Training Course, and much of it is applicable today.

First Jesus reminds them to ask the Lord for help. This first key step cannot be overemphasized. Sometimes we set off on our mission without clarity and guidance. “Ask the Lord,” Jesus tells them. I think in our egoistic, self-important mind set, this part is not considered too deeply, if at all.

“We got this,” is the motto of our day, not, “thy will be done.” Even in our ministry work, often our good deeds go awry and can end up making us feel good, but not necessarily serving the person we intend to help. Ask God for help.

Then Jesus sent them in pairs, it says. It is almost like the buddy system we use at camp, while swimming, or on adventure trails. It is always good to travel with a buddy. Ministry needs a companion, a sounding board, a partnership to be most effective. This is good to remember in our culture where individual expression is so highly regarded. Sometimes we can get the message that we have to make it on our own, but that often leads to spiritual loneliness. Pairs are good, and companions we trust are life treasures. Needing others is not a sign of weakness. Spiritual friends really help us strengthen our faith. That has been the experience of our Companions in Christ and Disciplines participants. Sharing with others about our struggles, our faith, and learning from each other builds bonds and produces spiritual growth that many had

given up on, but did then experience with the help of spiritual friends. Once we have our bearings and center, we then can gain the practice and disciplines we need to open our faith to the world.

Jesus knew that this mission would not be easy. “I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.” Lambs are characterized as vulnerable and they do not resist when led or attacked. Not necessarily what one would choose to emulate. These were dangerous times and Jesus had made quite a few people very upset. As his representative, they were putting their lives in peril as well. And he calls them to do it with sincerity, vulnerability, and non-resistance when they encounter anger and danger.

You may be accepted or rejected, but the truth of the message is not contingent on the response. Shake the dust from your sandals and move on. Success may not be readily apparent. Persevere. “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ Bless those people you encounter. Eat whatever is set before you.” It almost sounds like what we say to our children before they go to a friend’s house for dinner. But what Jesus is stating is that it is the host, not the guest that sets the context. We are to meet people where they are, not where we want then to be. It is about knowing them; relationship—bringing peace—healing.

The purpose is not to make them like us. In fact, it is not even about us!

Let them know that the kingdom of God has come near to them. Let them know that in meeting us they have glimpsed a whole different way of looking at the world: a new vision for the world, a world without boundaries and hoarding. The kingdom of God, where the hungry are fed and the wounded are healed, where all God’s children are precious, where humanity chooses to become the image of a creative God rather than a selfish force for greed and destruction.

Jesus gave them this vision, empowered them, and sent them out. The report back from the field two thousand years ago was that it worked! The messengers of God were triumphant and they returned filled with joy and amazed at God’s power.

Jesus teaches them to focus that joy, that new-found energy and sense of power in rejoicing that you are a child of God and your name is written in heaven.

This text is challenging and hopeful. If we take it seriously, it can take us way beyond our comfort zone and cause us to look closely at our priorities. It may lead us to places we never thought of going. And it is hopeful in that it reminds us of the possibilities. The reign of God is near. The disciples were amazed at what happened in Jesus’ name.

So, how is your mission going? How are you proclaiming peace and God’s reign today? How does this play out in your lives? What will you be able to report back to Jesus?

Today as we approach this Independence Day, we are reminded of the vision of our founding fathers and forebears. Are we true to that purpose?

We are so thankful for this nation and our freedom. We have been given so much and yet there is much to do.

We have a nation of religious freedom and yet indifference and apathy reign.

A nation of natural resources, and yet, destruction of environment.

A nation of democratic values, and yet, fewer and fewer vote.

A nation of equality, and yet racism still lurks.

It is a nation of abundance yet poverty and homelessness abound.

For the first time in history, we have the information, knowledge, technology, and resources to bring the worst of poverty to an end. What we don't have is the moral and political will to do so. It is becoming clear that it will take a new moral energy to create that political will.

I remember a few years ago, the Reverend. Dr. James Forbes, in this very room, spoke to many of us about poverty. In a responsive reading, we lifted up a vision where everyone's basic needs are met—food, housing, education, and dignity. In the spirit of Jesus, who came to bring “good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of God's jubilee”. We proclaimed that we will work for the day when EVERYONE is valued by our society and poverty is no more.

How far have we come? Are we still willing to work for that?

We value and celebrate our freedom. Liberty and justice for all, we pledge. I think it is quite poignant that our symbol of freedom, the Statue of Liberty, is not a fierce warrior, but a lady with a torch of light.

So as disciples, how shall we use our freedom? Does it come with a cost? Is there a responsibility to these freedoms? We may not be free of all burdens, but we can bear the right burdens. Is that not what servants of freedom do? Isn't that what Abraham Lincoln was saying? That from the honored dead there would be increased devotion. Isn't that what Franklin Roosevelt was saying? That there is more to freedom than pride and profit? And Thomas Jefferson? That all of us are created equal?

How are we going to use our freedom in this nation as it polarizes even further in this election year? Shall we use it to help the hungry and the poor? To better our community? To be responsible stewards? To shape moral lives with purpose? True freedom is a gift. But as Jesus shares today, it is also a journey. And you and I are a part of a mission which continues that journey.

We go as lambs among wolves. It is not going to be easy. Sometimes, we don't know where God is leading us. And yet, we know God is with us. We know that we will be prepared for come what may. You are gifted and chosen by God to be part of Christ's mission to this nation and to this world. Liberty and justice for all. Our mission is not yet accomplished. Let us, on the eve of our country's birthday, reaffirm our commitment to the cause. Liberty and justice for all. In Jesus' name may we help heal this broken world and work for the day when all will know, "the kingdom of God has come near."