

Sermon for Proper 9C
Sunday, July 3, 2022
“The Harvest is Plentiful”

Text: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

During the first half of the liturgical year, throughout the named seasons, we focus on God’s relationship to us through Jesus Christ—his incarnation, the various manifestations of his power and identity, his passion, death, and resurrection, his ascension, and finally the descent of the Holy Spirit. In Ordinary Time, the season after Pentecost, we focus on our relationship to God and each other. Today’s subject addresses us as disciples of Jesus Christ to go and make more disciples. Being a good disciple for God is not about keeping the message to ourselves, but rather about sharing that message with those around us. And what is the message? That God is a God of infinite, unconditional love, who created us in his image; therefore, we are expected to relate to each other with respect, recognizing God in everyone and acting accordingly.

Now today’s lesson is particularly practical. Today’s gospel passage begins with the introductory phrase, “After these things.” This ties today’s gospel to what immediately precedes it; therefore, the passage functions as an application of the conditions for discipleship set out in 9:57-62, which was part of last week’s gospel in which Jesus said simply, “Follow me.” Don’t look back, don’t dwell on your past, look forward and engage in the mission to which you have been called. Today’s gospel says that Jesus appointed seventy others (some biblical manuscripts say seventy-two), but the point is that the mission of the seventy repeats on a “grander scale” the mission of the Twelve outlined earlier in the 9th Chapter of Luke’s Gospel. In 9:2, Jesus “sent” the Twelve; the word “apostle” comes from the Greek verb in that verse that means to be sent with a commission. Jesus sent those twelve “to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”” In today’s scene, Jesus publicly commissions seventy or seventy-two others to do the same thing. The new movement of spreading the radical message of Jesus is blossoming and recruiting new members, new apostles, and new proclaimers of the story.

Jesus warned them that this work will not be easy: “Go! I am sending you like lambs surrounded by wolves.” Apparently to the ancient world view, the wolf was thought of as a deceitful, bold, and violent animal; when used to refer to people, it suggested that they were crafty, impious, blood-thirsty, quick to anger, and vicious. In other words, those commissioned to help Jesus spread his message would face criticism from many places, including those who were supposed to be the most faithful and

devout, or those who were supposed to be their closest family and friends. But Jesus told them to press on.

So, why does all this matter to us? For starters, today's message lets us know that this Jesus movement is something we can all be a part of. We are the heirs of the seventy who were commissioned. The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. There are a lot of folks out there who are waiting to hear about something good, something positive, something uplifting, and we can be a part of that by sharing the good news with others.

Second, we shouldn't let the baggage of our past or the weight of our present circumstances get in the way of carrying out our commission. It's very easy to complain; complaining makes us feel better. Sometimes we have things that we just need to get off our chest, things we need to put out on the table to help us deal with it or think through it. We can often get so encumbered by negativity that it clouds our vision of the opportunities before us. Sometimes others try to make us believe we don't have what it takes to succeed; sometimes a little voice in our head makes us think we can't. And yes, sometimes we can't always see the cloud with a silver lining, but Jesus said in today's gospel, "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, greet no one on the road." In other words, let go of the heavy stuff, the weighty stuff, the things that are holding you back. The advice to greet no one on the road doesn't mean you shouldn't be hospitable or nice; rather, it means you should stay focused on the story you have to tell, or the difference you intend to make. As Christians, our story is where the good news is: how we survived a great challenge; how we achieved some great milestone in our life; how good we feel today; how the things that excite us direct our actions to make a difference. Sure, there are times when it can be difficult; if we're grieving the loss of someone we love, or we hear about some tragedy in the news, if we received some bad news this week about our health, or maybe we're shackled with a personal burden. But the gospel tells us to keep on keeping on, because God is in the midst of it all. Even if we're having a bad day, the fact that we can talk about it is itself a blessing.

Finally, as disciples we must remember that we are lambs sent out in the midst of wolves. So much of what you hear about in the news or read on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram these days promote individualism, selfishness, isolationism, hatred, lack of respect for others, and survivalism. These are the wolves of the world. It really blows my mind! But as disciples of Christ, as Christian women and men who are supposed to be the laborers in the field, we cannot let the wolves of the world eat us up. Christian discipleship isn't just a bunch of empty words, but principles for daily living. Be willing to walk among the marginalized, talk to those we think are the enemy, even challenge the most traditional in the Church to reimagine how the people of God can still engage the world. The world wants to be crafty, impious, blood-thirsty, quick to anger, and vicious. The world wants to lead us to hate, the world wants us to be selfish, the world wants us to discriminate, but Jesus Christ said all along, "There's another way." We don't have to be the way the world wants us to be; there's another way—a way of love,

joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Paul called those the fruits of the spirit.) We're all on this journey of life together, and as we heard today in the passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." While the world wants us to be selfish, to shut out others and not care, good Christian discipleship is about showing the world that there's another way—a better way of living. If we can all do just that, we are already making a difference in the world around us.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." But, if we can go out and spread even just a little good news to a world longing to hear something good, then we, too, will be able to rejoice like the seventy when they returned, having felled some of the demons that plagued their lives. Discipleship is hard work, because it is work. It is not about complacency, it is not about quoting bible verses to further selfish agendas; it's not about condemning or putting down others; it is about love—loving God and each other—telling our story about how good God has been to us, how he has moved in our lives, how he has been there when no one else has, how he will always be there when other people and other things have failed or passed away.

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. As faithful laborers, we labor to share the message that there is a better way with a world starving to receive some good news of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Resources

"Commentary on Luke 10:1-11, 16-20" in *The Working Preacher*,
http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2910

Feasting on the Word for Proper 9 (Year C, Volume 3).