

There is an old story of a farmer who said lightning struck an old shed and saved him the trouble of tearing it down. Then it rained and saved him the chore of washing off his car too. When someone asked him what he was doing now, he replied, "I'm waiting for an earthquake to shake the potatoes out of the ground."

Read Luke 10:1-11; 16

As we look at this text, we confess we may have some baggage that we bring to this reading. For one thing, we are very much aware of the cultural differences, not only in our society, but even within our own church. At times we have reservations about rocking the boat of our established church traditions, even our church politics. We have baggage that might get in the way or conflict with our ministry of sharing the gospel.

As with the 72, our journey of discipleship is an exercise in obedience and faithfulness to the will of God in Jesus Christ. The opportunities for reaching out are endless and literally right in our own back yard. And as a reminder from last week, "Yes, but first let me go..." doesn't work for Jesus.

The issue for today's message is the witness of Christ's disciples to the world. And, unlike the farmer, the church cannot afford to wait for an earthquake to shake the unchurched out of their hiding places and into the church.

I am sure we have all heard or maybe even said this at some point in our lives, "I don't need to do anything about that because someone else

will do it." I will admit that most of the times I have heard that is when the topic or situation is about evangelism or situations that may be uncomfortable to us.

Jesus has sent us out as his disciples among the people we meet in our daily lives. Although we do not always know where our journey with Christ will lead us, he gives us the gifts we need for the tasks ahead and enables us to be part of a great adventure – namely the coming of God's kingdom by sharing the gospel.

The story of the sending out of the 72 teaches us being part of those who are sent out, is not easy. There is stress, tension, an element of risk, and great uncertainty.

Another thing the story tells us is that being sent out requires letting go of a lot of baggage. We must be able to move quickly, without unnecessary hindrances and I would include not just physical but also hindrances that distract us and slow us down.

And the story tells us that there is a good deal of excitement and anticipation. Part of the excitement and anticipation of an adventure is that we aren't sure how things are going to end, where the journey will lead, or how things will turn out.

As we shared with the youth on our recent mission trip, they will not see the "fruits" of their labor as they did work that may have seemed tedious and what is the purpose of cleaning classrooms and dorm rooms? But, for the people who were there and who they worked side by side with, and for the kids in the fall when they arrive, it will be a blessing!

Let's look back at the passage:

Luke 10:1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

Here we have a glimpse of the first church established by Jesus himself. Jesus has given them some training and they have watched Jesus in action. These seventy-two, though they did not attend him as closely and constantly as the twelve did, were nevertheless the constant hearers of his doctrine, and witnesses of his miracles, and believed in him. So much so, they did not hesitate when Jesus sent them out. No yes, but firsts here.

Now they are ready to go into the world and prepare it for the coming of the kingdom of God, but there is a problem. There are not enough evangelists; 72 is not enough. Jesus sent them, not to all the cities of Israel, as he did the twelve, but only to every city and place that he himself would soon visit.

So, Jesus wants them to pray for more. So too with us. We need to pray for people who talk about faith with others. We need to pray for missionaries around the world. And we need to pray for evangelists right here with us. Evangelism is not one of those terms us Presbyterians are comfortable with, but if we are sharing our faith and the gospel of Christ, we are evangelists!

The 72 are told not to worry. They are not to worry about money and clothing. And they are not to speak to strangers on the road. Sure, those are easy things to not worry about! Again, I think about the “excuses” the people gave Jesus in last week’s text and how some were uncomfortable with not having a place to lay one’s head. Their thought was “better have some funds on hand just in case things go amiss.”

But Jesus equipped the seventy-two to do what needed to be done. And if we are being obedient and following Jesus with our whole hearts, then we are not to worry about being sent out like lambs among wolves, not to worry about money, or what we are to carry with us. Just like the 72, Jesus has equipped us to go forth to be laborers in the harvest. The problem for some of us is that we feel we are not equipped or capable of doing the work God has called us to do when in fact Jesus has equipped us with everything we need.

Let’s listen to Jesus as he gives them the nut and bolts of evangelism:

5 “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ 6 If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

According to Jesus evangelism should be done in the context of hospitality. Invite people into your house for a meal. Or get together in a restaurant. You could also do this around a bridge table, on a golf course. It doesn’t really matter where.

And what do you do when you meet people this way? Jesus says pray for their peace. Pray for God's blessings to pour down on them. If anyone in the family is sick, pray for healing. Pray for whatever they need. And then enjoy the meal and conversation.

A couple other ways of showing hospitality could be serving at the Food Bank on our appointed Thursday's or helping serve dinner at the Haven. Showing hospitality takes place in many different forms and sometimes is radical!

And even though we may not see the fruits of our labor in those instances, we are making a difference in the people's lives. We can no longer be like the farmer waiting for the earthquake or wait for people to come to us.

Let's get back to Jesus:

8 "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you.
9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'
10 But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets, and say,
11 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.'

When people respond favorably to your prayers for them, tell them the good news of Jesus and that the kingdom of God is near. You do this by sharing your faith. You tell the people you are dining with the good news of what God is doing in your life.

You might be surprised by what happens when you pray for God's blessings on someone and then share the story of how God has blessed you. They will want some of what you have. And maybe you have heard people say, "What is so different about you? I want some of what you have."

But sadly, not everyone will respond positively. Listen to Jesus' instructions:

16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me."

Those who reject God's blessings, and those who don't want to listen to your faith story are not rejecting you. They are rejecting the God you believe in. When that happens there is not much you can do except continue to pray for them. And it is sometimes hard because we take it on a personal level when someone rejects our faith or when we share the good news with them. We feel we have been offended when in reality God is the one being offended.

So, what are we to do as Americans who want our nation to come together in the bonds of love and peace? Well, have an active social life. Invite others to join you in doing something you enjoy. And when you do this remember to pray for your guests to be blessed and be ready with a story of how God has blessed you. You will be amazed at what happens because the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

The front of our mission trip shirt said three things that as laborers in today's world I believe we can all do: do justice, love kindness, and walk

humbly. And it may be a stretch here but I think we can take those three simple things and weave them into today's passage.

- Do justice – pray for people, welcome all people, go forth boldly seeking peace, justice, and righteousness wherever God leads you.
- Love kindness – invite people to spend time with you, show hospitality to all, and BE KIND!
- Walk humbly – don't worry about the wolves or material things but walk humbly in obedience and faithfulness to God.

St. Teresa of Avila's well-known saying, reminds us that now we carry on the ministry that Jesus gave us:

Christ has no body on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out to the world.

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.

Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.

Fellow laborers, may it be so!