

The Mission and Return of the Seventy  
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20  
4th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C July 6, 2025  
Choptank Charge Pastor Nan Duerling

Good morning, friends. Nan hopes all of you are well and enjoying the lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer, especially now that our first heat wave has let up. She misses you all, but is resting and realizing that she's not as young or energetic as she used to be! I guess none of us are!

Last week, in Luke 9, we saw Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem and proceed toward the city. The disciples had gone ahead to prepare the way for his arrival in a Samaritan village, but the Samaritans were unwilling to receive him. James and John were so angered by this lack of hospitality that they wanted to call down fire to destroy the village, but Jesus would not allow that to happen. We also saw how three would-be disciples each had an excuse as to why they couldn't just "drop everything" and follow Jesus. No, said Jesus, you need to come now. His implication was if you don't come now you won't come at all.

As we move ahead one chapter in Luke this week, we hear Jesus instructing a large group of disciples about going ahead of him to all the villages he planned to visit. These missionaries were sent out two-by-two. In addition to the obvious support that two persons can give each other, two witnesses were required by Jewish law to establish credible testimony (Deuteronomy 19:15). Some manuscripts say there were seventy of them, whereas the Greek translation (Septuagint), which was translated in seventy-two days, claims that seventy-two went out. The number is significant because a table of nations listed in Genesis 10 shows seventy nations. Later in Luke (24:47) we will see that repentance is to be proclaimed "to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." So, although we can't prove which number was intended, seventy seems to foreshadow the proclamation of the gospel to "all nations."

Jesus is clear that theirs is a risky mission. They are going out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Certainly sounds as if they could easily become someone's lunch. We wonder if this comment is to give those who are fearful an opportunity to back out. Remember Gideon as he mustered troops for battle against the Midianites? God told him to send home those who were "fearful and trembling" (Judges 7:3). God gave Gideon the victory with only three hundred Israelite troops.

Jesus also gives the missionaries very specific instructions. First, he tells them what they may not take with them: no purse, no bag, and no sandals (10:4). Which one of us would leave without what we would consider these basic necessities? You never know when you might need some money or an extra pair of shoes/sandals. Why would Jesus

forbid you the privilege of carrying these? His instructions aren't simply to help his followers to travel light. Instead, they are meant to reinforce the idea that those who go forth in his name are to be totally dependent upon God, who will provide for all of their needs.

Next, Jesus tells them to "greet no one on the road" (10:4). Sounds rather rude doesn't it? A missionary is just supposed to rush by another traveler without acknowledging his or her existence. That may seem cold to us, but Jesus is focusing here on the urgency of the situation. There is no time to waste. Many need to hear the good news, but the laborers in the vineyard are few, compared to the number who needed to hear this news. The missionaries just cannot waste time on pleasantries.

Then, Jesus moves to discuss how his followers are to respond, first, if someone receives the missionaries, and second, if someone rejects them. Those who are invited into a home should bless the home and residents with peace. Once accepted, the missionary has a responsibility to stay and minister there. Sure, the missionary may have landed in a Motel 6-type place and be eager to move to Hyatt-like accommodations, but Jesus

admonishes them not to even think about such a move. His followers are to graciously accept whatever hospitality is offered, knowing that as laborers for Christ they are worthy to receive such hospitality as payment for their work in spreading the gospel. This comment in Luke 10:7 is considered by many to be the basis for a paid clergy. Accepting hospitality includes food that may be of an inferior quality or different from what they are accustomed to eating. Moreover, the implication here is that they are to eat even food that is deemed unclean by Jewish dietary law. Whatever it is, they are to receive it with grace and without complaint. The missionary is to announce that “the kingdom of God has come near to you” (10:9).

That may have been easy, but what happens if the missionary is not well received? He is to make a public statement in the streets. He will also say that the kingdom has come near, but this time, as a sign of protest. he will shake the dust off of his feet. Shaking dust off of one’s feet was considered a sign of repudiation, traditionally done when one returned to Israel from a foreign land. Yes, the kingdom had come near, but they did not receive it. Those in Sodom would have had an easier time than their more modern counterparts who refuse to accept the good news that the missionaries are bringing.

Verse 16 points out that a rejection of the missionary and his message is tantamount to rejecting Jesus and the one who sent him. Conversely, those who accept the message, accept him.

In verse 17, the seventy returned to Jesus. They are overjoyed because demons have submitted to them in Jesus’ name. Jesus’ response that he “watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning” (10:18) seems very puzzling. John Wesley interprets it this way:

That is, when you [the seventy] went forth, I saw the kingdom of Satan, which was highly exalted, swiftly and suddenly cast down” (*Notes, 10:18*, quoted in *The Wesley Study Bible*, footnote 10:17-20).

So, we see a close connection here between the work of the

missionaries and the falling of Satan. Previously in Luke (9:6, 10), Twelve disciples had gone forth to preach and heal. Here, though the seventy(-two) had gone forth with authority over demons. Certainly, the end times are coming, and Satan will be defeated in a conflict with God. Satan has been defeated, cast out of heaven, and his power broken. This is a result of the work of the seventy (-two). We need to understand their work as a sign that God is returning to earth.

In verse 19, Jesus goes on to say that he has given his missionaries power over snakes and scorpions. That may bring to mind snake handlers in some holiness or Pentecostal churches in Appalachia (see Mark 16:18). But that's not what Jesus is talking about here. Snakes and scorpions are sources of evil, at least symbolically. Jesus has given his followers power over these. And in the end, Satan will be defeated.

That's a word for us, isn't it? We, too, are being sent out with power to defeat the enemy. And the important thing is that our names are written in heaven. What do we do with the power that we have?

That's an excellent question for us to explore. If we think about today's lesson as a whole, we see that risk-taking and peace are intertwined. Recall that the missionaries were to go out, basically, with the shirts on their backs. They were risking everything, and had to trust their lives in God's hands.

Reaching their destination, they then had to trust that a host would take care of, providing food, lodging, and any other basic needs they had. If their host was willing to do that, they could bless him and his home with God's peace. If not, Jesus had instructed them to be on their way, shaking the dust off of their feet as they left.

Obviously, this missionary trip was successful. People had heard the good news about Jesus. We don't know how many heard, or how many accepted, but from Jesus' response in Luke 10:21-24 (beyond today's Lectionary reading) we can surmise that he was well-pleased with the work of these thirty-five (or

thirty-six) teams who went out in his name.

One of the most important things we can do is share the good news, offering the peace of God as we do so. And this really isn't all that difficult to do. We can speak with family, friends, and neighbors pretty much everywhere we go. The conversation need not be long or heavy...a few words while standing in the check-out line at the grocery store can lift someone's spirits and prompt them to think about Jesus. A random act of kindness can also lift spirits and draw people closer to Christ.

In our day, when many people seem to be constantly angry and ready to fight at the drop of a hat, we Christians need to be prepared to engage in loving, peaceful interactions with others. It's not necessary to give a thirty-minute monologue on your personal testimony to brighten someone else's day, to help that person see the love of Christ in you. Sometimes just a kind word or compliment can start a brief conversation that turns someone else Godward, at least for a few minutes. God can work with what you can do!

Our peaceful approach to others may, in fact, elicit a peaceful response from them. Luke's Gospel uses the Greek word *eirene*, or "peace" thirteen times, three of which are in chapter 10. It's related to the Hebrew word, *shalom*, which refers to health, wholeness, and an absence of conflict. We get the lovely name "Irene" from this word.

Today's reading shows that even in the midst of urgency and risk-taking, we can find peace. Ponder that idea for a moment. When you feel hurried or must take risks, do you really feel at peace? Perhaps if we allowed Jesus to bless us with his peace—and really took that blessing seriously—we might find the kind of peace that he gives, the peace that passes all understanding, the peace that he breathed on his disciples when he appeared to them after his resurrection (John 20:19, 21).

Where do you need peace in your own life right now? Are you worried about any of the wars around the world? Are you having problems with a neighbor or family member? Are you concerned

about your own job or financial future...or that of a loved one? Worry isn't going to get us anywhere, but God's peace can help us to settle our hearts and make better choices about the future.

Note that it is this peace that allows a missionary to go to people in need of hearing the good news and proclaim it. If those whom Jesus sends out have the authority to send and receive his peace, so do you...so do I. And if we take this story in Luke seriously, we see that it has implications far beyond sharing the good news. We are preparing for the day when even Satan will succumb. In today's world, isn't it comforting to think that Satan has a limited shelf-life, that his evil deeds of power cannot continue on forever?

The Holy Spirit lives in each one of us. Jesus has given us authority. The question is: Will we use God's authority, or will we just putter around and hope for the best? Our challenge this week is to do whatever God calls us to do in order to help others to hear the good news of Jesus. We need to be prepared to go forth in his name, unafraid and unashamed, to declare what we know to be true. We have to tell others the stories of Jesus, both as they appear in the Bible and as they have been enacted personally in our own lives. By our witness, we can bring the kingdom of God nearer and nearer. How will you do that?

In closing, Nan would like to thank everyone who has prayed for her or remembered her in some way. She is very grateful to those who are leading worship. Please know that she loves you all and misses you all. Please take good care of one another.  
Love, Nan