

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

This was one of those weeks in my sermon preparation that the more and more that I studied, the more difficult it became for me to decide where I needed to focus. There are so many layers to this story and it could be very difficult to examine where the focus should be. Then, to be honest, I struggled on how I should take this ancient story and apply it to what is happening here at Bay View and the ELCA, as well as churches across this country.

I was reading a commentary from Stanly Saunders earlier in the week and highlighted a few comments that really stood out. However, when I re-read the commentary, there was a question that he had that I **DID NOT** highlight that jumped out to me. The question made me think of the early disciples' journey and then the journey that we are currently on. Listen in to the question:

Do we want those to whom we go in mission to see our power and privilege or God's power and blessing?

On the surface, it may seem like a simple question, but if you look at churches across the nation and even at Bay View, many times success is measured on numbers, wealth, and programming.

This morning, I want to walk us through the story and there should be two words that will uphold the text and those two words are risk and hospitality. In addition to those two words, I will share with you once again where I was surprised and which aspects of this story that seemed to jump off the page to me that are in plain sight but I did not seem to see them before.

The story begins in verse one with Jesus sending off his disciples. The majority of the manuscripts use seventy individuals, so that is the language that I will use. Most of the time, when we think of Jesus and his followers, we think of the 12-disciples. But, there were more. A few individuals may wonder if there is a significance in the number because often it seems that there is a reason for a specific number. The number becomes symbolic. Well, there is symbolism in 70, for many people.

The seventy disciples Jesus sends, equaling the number of nations in Genesis 10. Thus, the symbolism can be that the mission of Jesus and the disciples is a mission to all nations.

While we are still in verse one, there is information in there that often gets overlooked. Jesus is sending them off in pairs to towns and cities that he is planning on going. Thus, just like last week; there is preparation work that is occurring.

As Jesus begins to send them off, he wants them to know that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. This trip could be thought of as an internship. The mission that he was sending them out on was the same as his own ministry: cure the sick and proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near to you. He then makes the following statement: "*ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest.*" This one sentence is something that caused me take a few moments and reflect.

You may not be aware of this "unknown" fact, but I, as an ordained minister, and the church have a responsibility in this arena. My ordination vows and Bay View's constitution reflects this verse when one of the responsibilities that we each have is to seek out and encourage qualified individuals to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel. Thus, I want to challenge ourselves to continually seek individuals who may be qualified and help them discern their call and provide them opportunities to be involved in the ministry of the Gospel.

In addition to that, I just want to briefly highlight that the harvest is plentiful is as true today as it was in the 1st century. Study after Study is showing that church attendance is plummeting. Not only is church attendance in a huge tailspin, but when individuals are asked about their religious affiliation, the “nones” are the fastest growing group. This is especially true with young adults. I experienced this time after time on the university campus. Many of them come up with their own views or piece a religious view together from multiple sources. They simply do not want to accept what others believe.

Jesus then gives them parting instructions. They are not particular easy instructions. He first wants them to know that I am sending you like lambs into the midst of wolves. Can we just pause a moment and say thank-you? Thank-you Jesus for sending us out into the wolves as lambs. That is so, um, comforting. But, in reality, Jesus is just letting them know that in addition to the reception that you are going to receive, you will have ample rejection. Most of us are not fans of rejection, but it is going to happen. Jesus is warning the seventy to expect resistance and rejection.

He then shares with the seventy, who definitely includes both males and females, that they are not to take anything with them and that they are not to greet anyone on the road. These instructions are two-fold. One, taking nothing with them shows the sense of urgency. For us, to go light in our travel, might mean the following:

“Don’t let stuff get in the way or conflict with your ministry of the Gospel”

Then not talking to anyone on the road has its foundation laid in the fact that peace and hospitality do not take root in the transience of the road but in the households of God people.

Those commissioned are to analyze each and every situation that they are stepping into. They are to announce peace. In the Jewish context, peace expresses wellbeing and restoration. Thus, they are to take their cues for their own actions from the hospitality they receive or are denied in the homes that they visit. On cues and actions, this is the instruction that was given to them:

If welcomed, the missionaries are instructed to heal and to announce the arriving kingdom. However, if they are rejected, they have permission to go out into the streets and protest by wiping the dust off of your feet.

For us, this could look like the following:

“Once you find like-minded people, work with them”

Now, here is something fascinating, at least to me. Last week, I shared with you some thoughts from Professor Michael Rogness and I want to do it again. He wanted his students to notice that Jesus only tells his disciples what they should do and he doesn’t say anything about measuring success. Jesus simply states, if people don’t accept your message; shake that dust off and move on.

In congregation life, it is difficult to avoid measuring success. We are famous at point to the A, B, C’s.

Attendance – **B**uildings - **C**ash on hand

May I be bold enough to say that those are the world’s ABC measurement tool box. I think Jesus ABC tool box would be the following:

Authority – **B**lessing - **C**ompassion

God has given us the same Authority that Jesus gave to the disciples, but we simply do not trust. We have the capability to bless individuals that we come into contact with on a daily basis, do we live into that? Then shower everyone with compassion.

In the book of Colossians, we read that we are chosen by God for anew life of love, and that we should dress in the wardrobe that God has chosen for us and the first piece of clothing is compassion.

Now, in the world that we live in, I understand that it is very easy for us to define our success by membership figures, giving levels, budgets and our annual reports. However, that is contrary to the text that we are residing in today.

The story that we read today ends with the 35 teams coming back with joy. They shared with Jesus the successes that they encountered. Jesus expected success, per se. But, that is not what he wanted them to focus on. He wanted them to be reassured that he gave them the “A”. The authority to have the power over the enemy and that nothing was going to hurt them. He then concluded by telling them not to rejoice that you were successful, rejoice that your names are in heaven.

I also want you to lean into the aspect that they did not live into the rejections that they encounter. They did not lament on the resistance that they faced. They focused on the positive. None, let me repeat that again, NONE of the seventy dwelled on their failed missions. Please remember that neither Fear nor Failure can undo your belonging to Jesus’ kingdom.

I want to give you permission to shake off that dust. Over the years and decades, maybe you have layers of dust that have accumulated. Wipe away all the guilt, shame, and rejection that has built up in you. Let our confessions and baptismal waters cleans you.

What Jesus called those seventy into and now calls us into his very risky business. It is tough stuff. It is not an easy journey. But, we can do it. We also need to be reassured that we do not have to do this alone. Jesus sent them out in pairs, he did not send them on a solo journey. Do not do this by yourself.

May we be like the disciples and live into our baptismal promise and serve all people following the example of Jesus. May we have the courage to be risk takers and live out our life like St Teresa of Jesus from the 16th century who had this well-known saying:

Christ has no body on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. You are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out to the world. Yours are the feet in which he is to go out and do good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.

AMEN