

“Sharing the Peace of Christ”

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
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Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 30:1-3, 11, 12

New Testament Lesson: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Edgar Guest was a 20th Century poet known as the People’s Poet. In his poem titled “Sermons we see,” he says:

I’d rather see a sermon
 than hear one any day;
I’d rather one should walk with me
 than merely tell the way.
The eye’s a better pupil
 and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing,
 but example’s always clear;
And the best of all the preachers
 are the men who live their creeds,
For to see good put in action
 is what everybody needs. ...¹

To see good put in action is what everybody needs. This is exactly what Jesus was doing when he sent 70 of his followers, his disciples, into the world to share news of the kingdom of God. Jesus had just been telling his closest disciples, the apostles – which by the way means “one who is sent” – he just told them he must “undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

And Luke tells us that it was after this foreshadowing of his departure that Jesus sends a large group of disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God. Jesus knows that the work of ministry – that fulfilling God’s vision of the church – takes more than one person. He knows it takes more than 12 people, more than 12 apostles. Jesus knows it takes many believers to affirm, celebrate and build up the kingdom of God, through the body of Christ, which is the church. If you believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, then heaven knows, it takes you to do the work of ministry, it takes each and every one of us.

There is a role for you in the ministry of this church, whether you are a long-time member, more recent member, regular visitor, friend of the church, older or young, male or female, boy or girl – we all have a role in building up the kingdom of God. As followers of Jesus we are those who have been sent, sent into the world to declare that the kingdom of God has come near.

It’s right here! Don’t you see it? Let me help you see it. That’s our role. And it’s a good thing we are called to a ministry such as that. Because just like at the time of Jesus, there are lots of people today who just don’t see it. They don’t recognize the blessings of God in their lives, they don’t feel the call of Jesus in their hearts, they don’t see the vision of God’s kingdom just waiting to break through – God’s kingdom, God’s reign breaking through their sense of hopelessness, breaking through hatred and self-centeredness

¹ For the full poem, visit: yourdailypoem.com. Retrieved January 20, 2019.

and a general disregard for fellow human beings, breaking through a culture of temptation and misdirection, breaking through to a more embodied faith, a more joyful Spirit of service, a more authentic expression of Christianity – loving God and loving neighbor as yourself.

This is what Jesus envisioned when he sent the 70 into the world, and this is what Jesus envisions for us. So let's look at what those 70 followers of Jesus experienced, so that we might be inspired, equipped and active in expressing our faith, in fulfilling our role as Christians.

There are six-mile markers on our journey into the world on behalf of Jesus. The first of the six is need. There is a need for us to be out there on behalf of Jesus, on behalf of God, just like there was need when Jesus contemplated his departure from his earliest disciples.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few," says Jesus, "therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way." Jesus is not fooling around here. He sees a real need and is quick to send the 70 as ministers on his behalf. "Go on your way," he says to them and to us. There is need.

The second mile marker to be aware of is danger. Going into the world on behalf of Jesus is risky. We might be rejected. We might be misunderstood. We might feel afraid to speak on behalf of the Lord. That's why Jesus tells the 70 – tells us:

"I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road." Jesus is saying that we have it within us to do the work he puts before us, each day. You don't need to be rich, you don't need lots of possessions – no special-equipment bag slung over your shoulder – you don't need to be dressed just right, with the best sandals on your feet, so to speak. No. You just need to be you. It's like the guy who said, "My problem was not, not being good enough, my problem was thinking I had to be." "I am sending you..." says Jesus. There is need, there is danger, and I am sending you. Don't worry about being good enough. Go on your way.

Jesus sends us on his behalf because Jesus has already blessed us with a giftedness for ministry, giftedness: the third mile marker. Each of you is gifted to minister to those you meet on behalf of Jesus. Or as Jesus says, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person." Your peace will rest on that person. How cool is that?!? Did you ever think of yourself as a vessel of peace being poured out over a world of need? That's pretty cool in my book, and in Jesus' book, too.

There is need, there is an element of danger, and there is giftedness, your ability to share the peace of Christ with others, in whatever way that may be.

The fourth mile marker for us to follow is focus. Jesus calls us to be laser-focused on ministry and not get sucked into worldly concerns and temptations. He says – again to the 70 but also to us – "Remain in the same house..., eat what is set before you..., cure the sick ..., and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"

In other words, spend enough time with people to enter into a relationship that reflects the good news of Jesus Christ, whether that is through table fellowship, ministering to their needs, or telling them what Jesus has done in your life, and how Jesus wants to work in their lives, too. It's not easy to do, but it is what we are called to focus on, as followers of Jesus, as those who are sent.

The fifth mile marker is selfless service. “Whoever listens to you listens to me,” says Jesus, “and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” In other words, it’s not about us. It’s about Jesus, it’s about God and God’s vision for this world.

Unless we set aside our own agendas – agendas of wealth and prosperity at the expense of selfless service, agendas of power wielded for our purposes and not God’s, agendas of agendas, our agendas that include only what we want to do with no regard for what God wants of us – unless we set aside our own agendas to do the work of Jesus, then God’s vision for this world will remain just that – some far off, shadowy, unattainable vision, rather than the reality, the certainty that God is even now bringing about – with us or without us. And again, without us, God’s vision and purpose is hampered. God calls us into service because God seeks to use us to bring about his vision and purpose. Selfless service.

The sixth and final mile marker in following Jesus is joy. I don’t know about you, but when I heard Jesus say in today’s reading just how much need there is and the danger that comes from addressing it, when I heard Jesus say I am gifted – we are gifted – when I heard the laser focus required to make a difference in this world, when I heard the call to selfless service, I was a little surprised to hear about the joy.

And yet here it is! The 70 are sent out into a world of need and danger, assured of their giftedness but called -challenged- to be focused and selfless, and they return with joy in their hearts, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” Now look. There are many demons in this world, many evil, misguided, thoughtless, heartless acts taking place, many governmental systems not working, many family dynamics that break your heart, many personal demons that threaten our individual and collective welfare, and yet, Jesus assures us that we have within us the power, the giftedness, the focus, and the selfless Spirit of Christ to overcome it all.

That is the good news of Jesus Christ. That is the kingdom of God coming near, near to us and through us, even in a world of need. “Peace to this house,” says Jesus. “... Your peace will rest on that person,” that person who comes near with a heart open to sharing in the peace of Jesus Christ, the peace of mind that we as a church provide through the Binder for Life course, a sense of peace in the hearts and souls of those who join us in worship, a Spirit of peace in our families and among our friends that comes from studying and knowing the word of God, peace in our communities through our missions giving, the small groups we’ve formed, the Young Life ministry rising up among us, and the community Thanksgiving dinner we host, peace within yourself through prayer and right living, peace in our nation through sound Christian discernment, peace in the security of our well-maintained buildings, peace in our self-governance through boards, committees and ministry teams that you serve on, and peace in the homes of our church members ministered to by Deacons, staff and other friends and members of the church.

These ministry programs and many more are just waiting to break through to a world in need, and God is calling you to share this ministry with those you meet. Glance through the bulletin, open up the newsletter, visit the church website, and share something that would be a blessing to someone you know. Share the peace of Christ, the fellowship of the Lord with the people in your life and in your community. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

We pray, Lord Jesus, for you to be made known in our community. We pray for multitudes of interconnections between our church and those around us who don't know you as you are.

We pray that by the power of your Spirit, you would reveal the ways you are working in our friends and families, in our coworkers and colleagues.

Use us, Jesus, to represent the truth of who you are to an unbelieving world.

Let us earn the right to be heard, and when we've earned that right, may we share words of life, words of relevance, words of truth, words of beauty, words of grace.

We pray your grace and healing touch upon those who are in need, especially and all those we continue to keep in thought and prayer.

Be with them, be with us, and be with this world as it seeks a peace only you can bring. It is in your name that we pray, using the words that you taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**