

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Keep Speaking the Word

Luke 10:1-12, 16-20

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. ⁵ "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' ⁶ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. ⁸ "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near 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 that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. ¹⁶ "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." ¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." ¹⁸ He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰ However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Several years ago, the Evangelism committee of this congregation attended one of our synod's "Schools of Outreach." These schools are designed to aid congregations in planning for outreach in their community. Our synod is in the process of revamping the way they put on these schools and perhaps they will be offering another one of these school sessions in our area in the coming year or two. In our text this morning, we see seventy two of Jesus' followers attending a "school of outreach." This one isn't sponsored by the Wisconsin Synod Board for Evangelism. This one is taught by Jesus himself. There could be no better teacher on the subject. And so it is good for us to listen up to what Jesus has to say to us about outreach. His lesson can be summed up with the simple phrase: *Keep Speaking the Word*. It was important at the time of Jesus. It is just as important now.

Jesus assured those 72 disciples of the great importance of the task at hand when he told them, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.*" These men knew the importance of bringing in the crops at just the right time. They also knew how difficult a task it was and how much more difficult it would be with only a few workers. Yet that is exactly what lay ahead for the followers of Jesus as they took part in the great harvest of souls—the gathering of believers into the kingdom of God. It was an urgent task. And it would, at times, be a difficult one.

You can sense the urgency of the task in Jesus' instructions: "*Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.*" They were not to spend their time making preparations for the journey. They were to get right to work. And even along the way, they were not to take out time to greet anyone on the road. Jesus was not asking the disciples to be rude here. We have to understand that the kind of greeting Jesus was speaking about was more involved than "Hi. How are you?" Jesus did not want these missionaries to take excessive amounts of their time exchanging pleasantries. There was much work to be done.

And it was not always going to be the most pleasant work. What made the task difficult is that not everyone would receive their message with believing hearts. There would be some that would completely reject them. Jesus let the disciples know exactly what they should do in both circumstances. Jesus said, "*When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'*" This must have been very rewarding work—enjoying the companionship of fellow believers, carrying out a mission of mercy among the sick, and most important proclaiming that the kingdom of God is near. The Savior for which they had waited so long was even now accomplishing his great mission in this world. Soon their redemption would be complete. True peace was theirs. What a great comfort for those believers to hear these words and what a great joy for the disciples to speak them.

But this trip would not be all wine and roses. Jesus also said, “*But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say,* ¹¹ *‘Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.’* ¹² *I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.*” These followers of Jesus were to be certain that there would be those who would greet them with stubborn rejection. They could expect persecution, ridicule and hearts that would not believe. Jesus gave them a message for these kind of people as well. The amazing thing is that it is the same message: “*The kingdom of God is near.*” Only for these towns, it was not a comforting message, but one of judgment. If they persisted in their unbelief and rejection, the kingdom of God would still come, but, sadly, they would not be a part of it. Their hardened hearts placed them outside the peace of forgiveness and under the wrath of the righteous Judge: God Almighty. Although this message might seem harsh or unloving it was the exact call to repentance that those towns needed to hear.

Our mission is just as urgent and can be just as difficult as was that of Jesus’ followers. Look around you. Look at your neighborhood. Look at your family. Look at your workplace. There are still many souls that need to be harvested for the Lord. And the tool that you have is the same one Jesus gave to his disciples: his Word. And it is fun when that word is received warmly. One of the greatest things about being a Christian is the number of opportunities you have to share God’s Word with people who are eager to hear it. Your family wants to hear you speak the Word, your Christian friends enjoy the encouragement you give them. You know the joy of sharing that Word.

But what about the times it is not received warmly? What about the times we need to shake the dust off of our feet? These are the times that can be very challenging for the Christian. These are the times where the devil is right there to tell you that maybe you should just not say anything at all. Why face the ridicule of speaking about God’s Word when you could simply change the subject to small talk? Why say something that you know someone doesn’t want to hear? You could come off as harsh or unloving. You could lose their respect. It’s easier to stay quiet. But it is not God’s command to stay quiet. His command is to speak to those who like or like it not. Staying quiet is more than a missed opportunity. It is a sin.

By now, you probably realize that you are an unworthy messenger. How could you dare speak to other’s God’s Word when you have so many times offended that Word with your silence? This is where God’s grace once again shines in your life. It is true that you are not worthy to handle the Word of truth. Yet God has made you worthy. How? He has shown you his forgiving love in his Son Jesus Christ. And he has revealed that love to you on the pages of Scripture. The reason you can be so bold as to speak the Word is that that Word has first been spoken to you. God’s forgiveness empowers you to be a witness and to speak with authority. You are not proclaiming yourself, but rather Jesus Christ. That is the message: “Jesus Christ died for sinners, of which I am the worst.”

It’s a simple message, but a powerful one. It’s a message packed with great authority. With the words of the gospel you have been given the authority (as Jesus says) “*to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy*” Think of how completely the Word of Jesus Christ defeats the devil and his evil forces. The devil lures people into believing that there is no such thing as sin in the world and that they can do whatever they want. The Word exposes sin for what it is and points people to their Savior. The devil tries to tell people that their sin is too great and they could never enter heaven. The Word says that Jesus died for all the sins of the whole world—no person is excluded. There is no lie of the devils that cannot be squashed with speaking the Word.

That’s a great amount of power you possess. The disciples thought it was pretty great as well. They said, “*Lord, event he demons submit to us in your name.*” This provided Jesus with an opportunity to give the disciples and us one last lesson about evangelism. He said, “*Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*” These words speak of the attitude of one speaking the Word. And that attitude is one of humility. Don’t for a second let yourself get puffed up about the power you possess in proclaiming the gospel. Recognize, first and foremost, that it is only by grace that you are even allowed to speak anything about your Savior Jesus. This is what gives you joy—that in spite of your sin and weakness, your name is written in the book of heaven. The more you see the awesomeness of that truth, the more you will be filled with a passion to keep speaking the Word to anyone who will hear. Grant this, Lord, unto us all.

Amen.