

+ Luke 10:1-12, 16-20 + I Am Sending You Out + 7th Sunday after Pentecost + 12 July 2015 +

The workers gather around the tables with their morning coffee in hand and perhaps the occasional chocolate chip cookie. They got up early and got ready for a new day of work on the project. "Thank you, Lord, for another day of grace. Will it rain again today or will you grant us some sunshine? Will we make some progress on the trusses or the cupola or the link? What will be accomplished by the time the day is done? Who will come and help us today?" They joke a little and wait for the morning devotion. Once that time with the Lord is spent, it's time for updates, announcements, and then a project manager hands out the work assignments for the day. The workers then head out to their assigned tasks equipped and ready to serve praying that the Lord will bless their efforts with safety, progress, and joy.

That series of events has been happening here at Cross of Christ for just over a month. Our brothers and sisters in Christ have been starting out each day with coffee and Christ before being sent out to continue the work of expanding and renovating this facility. Admittedly, between trusses and measurements and rain, there have been moments of frustration and disappointment, but as everyone who has helped with this project would attest, there has been joy because the Lord continues to bless these efforts. People are noticing and God-willing, many more will come to know Jesus better in the days and years to come.

It probably wasn't all that different 2,000 years ago when about 72 of Jesus' disciples gathered to get their work assignments. By the last year of Jesus' ministry, he had gained a pretty large group of followers many more than his original twelve apostles. He had been instructing a group of about 72 men. Now it was time to send them out **"ahead of Jesus to every town and place where he was about to go."** They were to prepare the way for the Lord's coming as Jesus made his final journey from the region of Galilee in the north down to the city of Jerusalem, where he would suffer and die. Yet before Jesus sent them out, he had some final instructions for them.

Jesus told his disciples, **"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."** Jesus had once said the same thing as he looked out at a sea of harassed and helpless people. The fields were ripe for harvest with countless souls in desperate need of a Savior. Jesus then answered his own prayer by calling his first disciples.

Three years later the fields were just as ready for harvest because countless souls still desperately needed the Savior. There was so much more work to do. So the Lord offered that prayer for more workers and then immediately answered it.

"Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves." Jesus answered his prayer by sending out those 72 disciples two-by-two to work in his harvest fields, but even in pairs, they seemed as harmless lambs **"among wolves."** These disciples were sent out to work where they would likely face opposition, rejection, ridicule, even violence. After all, a lamb in the midst of wolves has very little chance of survival. You wonder if the disciples felt a little fearful, a little nervous when they received their work assignments from Jesus.

Nevertheless, Jesus sent out those disciples to work with the understanding that he would provide for them no matter how thankless their task might be. He would help them through the hospitality and support of others. Jesus didn't want them to take along their own money or to beg. Instead, the Lord would open homes for them where they would have lodging and meals, even as the Lord granted peace to those homes.

Their work wasn't just to go to villages and towns and regions to stay in the homes of hospitable people. No, they had a specific job to do. **"Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'"** When those disciples entered a town that welcomed them, they were to share God's mercy through miracles of healing and to proclaim a simple single message—**"The kingdom of God is near you."**

They were to proclaim the good news that Christ, the Savior-King, would be there soon. He would bring his forgiveness and mercy and peace in greater ways than healing. He would change hearts and rescue souls for eternity. He was on his way to suffer and die for their sins and would be there soon.

Naturally that got Jesus' disciples excited, but not every village or town would welcome them. In fact, some would either rudely reject them or simply ignore their message as they continued to yawn their way into hell. For those who rejected Christ's messengers, the message was just as simple. The disciples were to go into the streets and say, **"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."** They would proclaim a serious warning. Jesus didn't even want their dirt on his disciples' feet. Judgment was coming to those who heard his message, yet rejected it.

Jesus wanted his disciples to realize that his message—his Word would do the work on hearts. If someone listened to them, they listened because of what that Word accomplished. If they rejected that message, they were really rejecting God himself. **“He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”** With that, Jesus’ workers finally went out to their assignments.

Luke records for us what happened. **“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’”** At the end of the day, those workers rejoiced because of what was accomplished. Yet Jesus wanted them to rejoice most of all in the knowledge that eternal rest and deliverance was theirs through him.

Whether you are a Builders for Christ volunteer or a member or friend of Cross of Christ, the Lord also has work for us to do. As Jesus sends us out to work, he wants us to realize that the work assignment he has for us is urgent, challenging, unpredictable, and often thankless. It very well may mean rejection, opposition, and laziness—and that’s just from your own sinful heart. However, this work that the Lord has for you and me is necessary, surprising, and almost always joyful—even in the toughest of times.

So what’s the job? Where is Jesus sending us? What will he have us do and how will we do it? Well, Jesus sends us out much like he did those 72 disciples so long ago. He doesn’t send us out alone. He has brought us together as a congregation here in central New York to support and encourage one another as we serve in our personal mission fields in our homes, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and our classrooms. The Lord has also made us part of something bigger—something beautifully illustrated by the assistance we’ve received not just from Builders for Christ, but also from brothers and sisters in Christ across North America supporting us with offerings and prayers as part of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Even as we walk together in Scriptural unity, we support and encourage each other to carry out the mission work that Christ has given to us.

You see, the harvest fields are just as ripe as they were when Jesus sent out those 72 disciples. Like Jesus, we see ripe fields of sinners in desperate need of a Savior. It’s too much work for one pastor or one congregation to reach them all—even with help. Souls are dying! That’s why Jesus so urgently instructs his disciples and prays for more workers in his fields.

How will that work get done? Only if the Lord of the harvest provides the workers! When Jesus asks his disciples to pray for more help, he actually answers that prayer by sending them! The Lord in his grace still provides workers trained at his feet to bring in his harvest. He enables men and women to serve in public ministry by providing training in our synod’s schools at Luther Prep, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He trains them well before sending them out.

...But pastors, teachers and staff ministers can’t do this work alone. Instead through public ministers, the Lord equips other men, women and children to serve privately in the ministries of their congregations and schools. Equipped for service through his Word, the Lord sends out children and teens and adults, parents and grandparents, singles and the widowed and divorced because the harvest is so great and time is so short. Through public ministers the Lord equips each of us to work so all his servants can work side by side to serve the Lord as partners in the Gospel ministry.

The truth is, it’s not easy, but remember who is in control! Jesus once said, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** (John 10:11) Remember Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to do just that! The Good Shepherd would lay down his life for his harassed and helpless sheep and bring them forgiveness. He still protects his sheep and guarantees his promise with his own innocent blood. He then sends us out with his Word.

You see, the Word we proclaim is the same as that of the 72 disciples—**“The kingdom of God is near you.”** That means proclaiming the Law in all its sharp fury and the Gospel in all its sweet joy to people we know and love. With that Word, Jesus assures us that he gives us his own authority. The gates of hell will not be able to hold back the Gospel going out through us to many others and Satan will fall like lightning—all because of Jesus.

That's why with every soul rescued by God's grace, we rejoice. Yes, we rejoice in what God accomplishes when we share his Gospel, but above all, we rejoice because of what Jesus accomplished for us. Our names are written with Christ's holy blood in the Book of Life. We're cleansed of the guilt of all of our sins and someday we'll celebrate Christ's work well done in the eternal rest of heaven.

So, my dear fellow workers, we've spent time with Jesus and now he sends us out with this assignment—Ask the Lord of the harvest for workers, go with the Gospel even among wolves, and rejoice in what Christ has accomplished for you and will accomplish through you. Amen.