

Luke 10:1-12, 16-20 Pentecost 7 7/28/19

When I was little, sometimes my mom let me help her bake. It's a stretch to call what I did helping when I was four years old. We know who was really doing the work. A better way to say it is my mom tolerated me in the kitchen. But I remember cracking eggs and getting the slimy whites all over myself. Or stirring flour into the dough and getting flour all over myself. Of course, helping in the kitchen came with its own rewards. Licking the brownie batter off the big spoon. Having a taste of the cookie dough. And two or three more tastes when my mom turned around. Waiting with anticipation as the warm smell of the oven wafted through the house. But the best part by far was at the end when we finally got to eat the product of all our hard work. In the gospel today we hear that God has invited us to help him. Not in a kitchen but in a harvest field. We have some work to do but, we know who's really doing the work. The task of harvesting is certainly rewarding on its own. There is much to do and much to rejoice in. But Jesus tells us the greatest reward is still to come. Our names are written in heaven. **Yes, God calls us to help in his harvest. There are three things God wants us to do: Go into the field, support the field, and rejoice.**

Jesus didn't have much time left on this earth. His whole ministry only lasted about 3 years, yet now he was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. So Jesus did some delegating. He sent 72 of his followers ahead to prepare the way. Jesus gave them some interesting instructions. Maybe Jesus gave more explanation. I don't know. But from what Luke recorded, I wonder if those men were left with some questions. If it's so dangerous why is he sending us in the first place? A little lamb out on its own in some dark wilderness encircled by snarling wolves isn't going to last long. Why can't I bring anything? Why can't I greet anyone? What if no one takes us in?

But Jesus instructions show two things. First, the urgency of the situation. God had prepared a great harvest. They needed to go now. They needed to ask for more help. They didn't have time to greet someone and get into a long conversation on the road, there were whole cities to be harvested. Second, Jesus' instructions show a need to trust in him. Yes, they would be among snarling wolves, but it was Jesus who sent them and Jesus who would be with them. They couldn't be distracted by an abundance of possessions. They needed to trust that God's message of peace would work in people's hearts. They needed to trust that God would use people to take care of them.

Can you see those 36 pairs of men going out timid at first, but growing ever bolder as they went from house to house? Amazed as diseases were cured before their eyes, homes were opened before them, food placed in front of them. Confident even in the face of rejection because they knew it wasn't them being rejected, but God and God had their backs.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Jesus' command to go into the harvest is for us too. And Jesus words of urgency and a need for trust *is for us* too. Perhaps your experience is like mine. When I hear these words of Christ "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.*" I feel inspired, motivated, ready to go get out there... for a moment. Then these words start to hurt. They cut me right to my heart. They let me see how little urgency I do show. How little trust I have.

I make excuses. I can't immediately tell everyone I meet "the kingdom of God is near!" On some level it's true! If I walked around Wegmans with a poster saying the end is near people would think I'm crazy. But then I start to use that excuse when I have no business using it. My

coworker who known for years is crushed by the loss of a loved one. The perfect time to share the peace I have in Christ with them. But I don't. The neighbor I've known for years but have never invited to church. Or maybe I did one time and they came but never came again. I give up on them. I think God's word will never work on them. Why? Because I think God can't do it? Because I'm afraid? I don't want to be one of those little lambs among the wolves. Where's my urgency? Where's my trust?

God reigned fire down on the ancient city of Sodom for its wickedness. Knowing what we know. Acting how we act. We deserve far worse.

[But] Peace to you. Be sure of this, the kingdom of God has come to you. That means this. While we deserved the burning wrath of God. Jesus bore it instead. In doing so Jesus shattered the chains of sins. He snatched us out of the kingdom of this world. He brought us into his kingdom. Jesus now reigns in your heart. He's forgiven our lack of urgency. He's forgiven our lack of trust. Even forgiven those times we should have proclaimed who he is but stayed silent. We can hear Jesus' urgent cry to go out into the harvest fields guilt-free. We have peace.

The peace we have is the very reason we do go into God's harvest field. We go offering this same peace to others. A peace that Christ has already won for them, all we need to do is tell them it's theirs. Jesus uses the picture of a harvest. There's a lot of work that goes into a crop before you can harvest, plowing, sowing, weeding, fertilizing, watering. But in this picture, all of that is done. God has gotten everything ready. God knows who his children are. There's a field out there, all we need to do is go harvest it. And just like my mom gave me the privilege of baking with her. God gives us the privilege of going into the harvest field. We go into the field whenever we let our light shine as a Christian, build relationships, invite a friend from school to church, or anything we do that shares the Gospel of peace.

God has given this opportunity to go to all believers. But he also gives Christians specific callings or responsibilities. In these specific responsibilities, God calls his people to help in his harvest **field by supporting**.

Jesus appointed 72 specific people to go out and preach. They took nothing with them and gave God's people the opportunity to serve by providing for them.

It's similar to how things work today. Some believers have the full-time job of preaching and teaching. For example, you have called me to do that here at Cross of Christ. Other believers have a full-time job of being a mother or father, being a student, being an electrician or mechanic or engineer or farmer. Maybe it seems like you're only serving God when you volunteer to teach Sunday school or canvas or do churchy things. But it's not true. God is just as pleased when you drive your kids to a soccer game or do your homework. It's in addition to these everyday acts of service God gives you opportunities to support pastors and teachers.

The most important way we can do this is to pray. Pray that God continues to send workers. Pray for those training at the seminary to be pastors and those going to school to become teachers at Martin Luther College. Pray for pastors and their families, that their work remains a blessing to them and that they remain faithful. And know the Lord of the Harvest will answer your prayers.

A second way we support God's workers is through our offerings. It would be a lot harder for me to do my job if I had to find a side gig. But through your offerings you have given us a place to live, money for food, I was able to focus on studying God's word, writing a sermon,

meeting with Pastor Goetzinger and the elders so I know what's going on. Your offerings allow the church to have lights and air conditioning and heat in the winter. They go to support missionaries in Africa and the building of seminaries in Vietnam.

A picture often used for the relationship between a pastor and his people is Aaron and Moses. One day while the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness they were attacked by a people called the Amalekites. Moses and Aaron went up on a hill and whenever Moses held his hands up, the Israelites were winning. But his hands grew tired and whenever he lowered them, the Israelites started losing. So Moses sat on a stone and Aaron held his hands up for him. Who's job was more important? Trick question because God was the one who was really making the Israelites win. He just gave Moses and Aaron different ways to serve. God is the one who brings people to faith. God is the one who prepares the harvest. Today God gives his people different ways to serve too.

God wants us to help in his harvest field by going and by supporting. As those 72 men returned we see how God wants us to rejoice in the harvest.

We don't know how long these men were out but Luke skips ahead to their return. And they come back stoked. Not only did they heal people, not only were people won for the kingdom of God, even the demons submitted to them! Jesus *replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

Again, Jesus leaves us with some questions. When is Jesus talking about seeing Satan fall? What does he mean snakes and scorpions won't harm us? I'm pretty sure they can. And the last bit sounds like he's rebuking these men for rejoicing. The best explanation seems to be that Jesus isn't rebuking them, he rejoicing with them! But also reminding them about what they should rejoice in most.

Satan's power is broken. Satan was the prince of this world. He held it captive in the chains of sin. But then Jesus came to earth as a little baby. Overcame Satan's temptations in the desert. Proclaimed freedom through these 72 men. And ultimately defeated Satan on the cross. The lighting is the perfect illustration of a blinding powerful force which is suddenly extinguished. Satan holds no power now. There's nothing he can do to halt the powerful march of the gospel. Sure he may sound scary, even lightning is followed by thunder. But even if Satan were to send snakes and scorpions after us they couldn't harm us unless God allowed it.

So we too rejoice. We rejoice as we witness God's word to win more hearts for his kingdom. We rejoice as we bring the message of peace to those wracked by guilt. We rejoice as we see God use our offerings for his service and answer our prayers. But Jesus reminds us most of all rejoice because our names are written in heaven. Most of all rejoice not in the sacrificial but the sacramental. Rejoice not only in what we get to do but in what God has done.

When I got to bake with my mom she gave me work to do. I got rewarded as I worked. But we could say the best reward was the cookies in the oven. God gives us work to do in his harvest field. He calls us to go. He calls us to support. And we rejoice. We rejoice in the work God accomplishes through us. Most importantly we rejoice that our names are written in heaven.