

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
July 7, 2019

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Let's take a pop quiz this morning. Are you ready?

According to the 28th chapter of Acts, what island was Paul shipwrecked on as he traveled to Rome? *Malta* (Acts 28:1)

Ok, that one was a bit challenging. Let's change course and see if you can match these slogans with the company they are connected to.

- Just do it! (Nike)
- Keeps on going and going and going. (Energizer batteries)
- I'm loving it. (McDonalds)
- Melts in your mouth, not in your hands. (M&M's)
- The quicker picker upper. (Bounty)
- The few. The proud. The _____ (Marines)
- You're in good hands. (All State)
- God's work. Our hands. (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, i.e., ELCA)

See those weren't so hard, were they? All those have something in common. They are simple and short yet very effective in identifying a critical characteristic or value of the organization. Take for instance "God's work. Our hands." Only 4 words, but they say so much. Take 30 seconds and talk to someone next to you about what you hear in these 4 words. (*Please, introduce yourself if you don't know them*) If anyone is bold enough, shout out an answer or two. (*Wait a few seconds for responses*) Some responses may be:

- We are joined to the work God does in the world.
- We are God's.
- God has a mission for the church.
- Our hands and bodies are important to God.
- God continues to be active in the world yet today.
- God created us to do God's work.

When we listen to this morning's gospel passage, "God's work, our hands" very well could be the introductory heading prior to the text. There is much work to be done as Jesus tells the 70 appointed for this mission, "The harvest is plentiful." It's a miracle in and of itself they didn't retreat and go home at the news He tells them next. For while the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few and like last week, the work will not be easy and will at times may be frightening, dangerous and uncomfortable as He says, "See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals." Jesus has not asked for volunteers. He appointed these 70 with the task of carrying out the work that He had been doing leading up to this point – to bring greetings of "Peace" and announcing, "The kingdom of God has come near." They are the very presence of Jesus in the world as He tells them, "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

Sometime ago, I came across a quote attributed to St. Teresa of Avila, a 16th century Carmelite, which states:

*Christ has no body on earth but yours; no hands but yours;
no feet but yours.*

*Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ
looks out to the world.*

*Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.ⁱ*

Like "God's work, our hands" this quote too captures the essence of this morning's gospel text. Like the 70, Jesus has appointed us for the task of proclaiming to the world the kingdom of God has drawn near. We are his body. We are his hands. We are his feet. We are his eyes.

At times, it is easy to feel unqualified or prepared for this task; however, we do have tools in our bags to help us. One such tool the Spirit has equipped us with is prayer. Notice the very first thing the seventy are told to do is, "**Ask the Lord.**" "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." *The Message* translation of the Bible states it this way, "So on your knees; ask the God of the Harvest to send harvest hands."ⁱⁱ Before anything else, they are to seek God's guidance and help. Jesus instructs his followers, then and now, on a vital mark of

faith – communication with God. Those of you who were present last week for Confirmation Sunday may recall the words our youth stated as they affirmed their baptismal vocation of being a follower of Jesus stating, “I will, and I ask God to help and guide me.” The work they committed themselves to will not be done alone but will be done under the guidance of the One who has claimed them in their baptisms.

Next, Jesus sends the 70 out in pairs in part most likely for their personal safety as we recall they were traveling through Samaritan territory. Samaritans and Judeans were not the best of friends and last week we heard of how one Samaritan village refused to welcome Jesus and his followers. However, there was more to it than just safety. God’s work is not done alone. Being part of the body of Christ (i.e., the church) means we walk together trusting that He walks with us. We need each other for strength and support. We lift the other when he/she stumbles.

Jesus also tells the 70 to travel light. In fact, they are to take no purse, no bag and no sandals. That’s a tough one for us today. We have so much stuff. As our family prepares for a trip to Glacier National Park my list of supplies needed seems to grow by the day. An all-day hike on trails with no water, no bathroom facilities, no places to stop for a meal requires one to be properly prepared. Snacks to refuel your body. Plenty of water. A good pair of shoes or boots. A sturdy and comfortable pack to carry everything. A first-aid kit. Several layers of clothing to account for the many temperature changes one may encounter. A decent pair of binoculars to see the vast array of wildlife in the park. And of course, bear spray. So much stuff. I can’t begin to imagine taking nothing.

It’s difficult to fully say why Jesus issues this directive. However, imagine being sent out with little to nothing. You have no other option but to put your trust in God to provide. You have no other option but to rely on the hospitality of strangers. It’s almost as if Jesus is saying, nothing will be able to hold you back or get in your way. Time is of the essence so don’t waste it gathering supplies. There will be no weight of a large pack of supplies to slow you down. There will be no money that will sidetrack you by the lure of spending a night in an inn or stopping for souvenirs on the way. Heck, he even says to not greet anyone on the road. That doesn’t seem like good Christian hospitality now does it. Yet, again I think the point Jesus is saying is they have work to do. His work. God’s work. Kingdom

work. Don't take a chance of being detoured on the way. Someone may lead you astray. It's the very same thing we heard Jesus do last week as he set his face toward Jerusalem. The mission was at hand and nothing was going to stop Jesus from carrying out the will of God.

So, if we take this passage and apply it to our life together gathered by the Holy Spirit and then sent by Christ to do God's work in the world, what might that look like? Perhaps, it may just help us shape the questions we ask as we seek to do God's work with our hands.

- Have we sought God's help for guidance and discernment?
- What is it that Jesus may be calling us to leave behind? (e.g., wants versus needs, our agendas versus God's agendas, ways of doing things that may have once worked to bring vitality and growth but no longer do, guilt or shame we may harbor, feelings of inadequacy for the work God has tasked us with, etc.)
- Who is our neighbor Jesus commands us to go and proclaim the good news to? If the work is comfortable and extends only to those like us, well, maybe we need to look closer at Jesus' words.
- How might we be changed in doing this important work?

Notice what happens when the 70 return. They are filled with joy. Whatever trepidations they may have had has been replaced by joy. When have you done God's work with your hands and experienced that same feeling of joy? That's the joy of the grace of God in Christ. That's the joy in knowing that we are God's and God is using us to do God's work. Amen.

ⁱ Michael Rogness, Commentary on Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 (www.workingpreacher.org)

ⁱⁱ Scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.