

July 7, 2019

C: Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Where the Mission Begins

A Sermon Expositing Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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I hope it does not come as an unwelcome surprise to you, but all who call themselves by the name of Christ are missionaries. We all have a part to play in the breaking in of God's greatest hopes for the world even if our part is located within our own communities. So like those seventy followers of Jesus sent out in our gospel reading this morning we too are preparing, continually preparing to be sent out as emissaries of God's redeeming love.

You may have noticed though, that the causes of inclusion, love, and peace stand against considerable foes, so we're going to need to bring the absolute best of what we have, the best of who we are to whatever work we find to do. So let's take inventory:

Who here has the power to cast out demons?...Failing that.

Who here has the power to cast out all disease?....some perhaps, but not all.

Who here has the power to see, discern, name, and vanquish racism in a moment?...I'm still trying to rid myself of it.

Who here knows what is necessary, has the resources, and the charisma to draw all people together behind a comprehensive plan to end poverty.

We could go on, but it is already beginning to be clear that we do not have the tools we need to accomplish our mission.

We are not like Jimmy Lathing. Without exaggeration Jimmy was known by every soul in town. That's not really saying much, there were only a few hundred people in his central Texas town, but he knew just about every one of them and they knew him. They knew him in fact, because he was the guy to go to if you needed to borrow equipment for an adventure. He had been an outdoorsman all his life and in his mid-seventies he had no intention of giving it up serving as one of the leaders of the RAs at his church (that's the Royal Ambassadors kind of like boy scouts with Bible Studies). He was always taking some group camping somewhere and through all those trips over all those years he'd collected all the gear. If you needed a trekking backpack you could get it from Jimmy. If you needed instruction on how to start a fire, Jimmy was your guy. Or a canoe? There are five on the rack behind the garage, oars and life vests are on the pegs inside, just come on by and get what you need, it'll be unlocked for you. Jimmy was like REI, LL Bean, and The Northface all rolled into one except with affordable pricing. But the pinnacle of all that gear was a piece of equipment that town legend said only Jimmy

Note: Sermon manuscripts are written for the ear rather than the eye. If grammar or punctuation seem unconventional and the meaning unclear, try pronouncing the sentence aloud phonetically.

could use. Oh, he'd let you borrow one they said, he's got about forty of them, but you'd rather him use them – his prized possessions, his Dutch ovens. Jimmy was the unchallenged champion of campfire cooking. The entire town proclaimed the wonder of Jimmy's campfire biscuits. Now, it's hard to find a good biscuit in New York so I might need to let you know that a good biscuit will change your life and scarcely a day went by that I wasn't reminded of the wonders of Jimmy's biscuits somewhere in town.

Then one day I had a chance to try them. There was an early morning all-town event that required someone to camp out and watch over the equipment all night so of course Jimmy did that and in the morning hours he got up, started a fire, mixed up some biscuits and set breakfast on for the volunteers shortly to arrive. There were about fifteen of us gathered around when he served sausage, eggs, and *biscuits*. Everyone seemed keenly aware that I had not yet had a chance to try the biscuits that were the talk of the town and they all seemed oddly interested in what my response would be. I had never been watched so closely as I ate a biscuit. I took a bite and let the warm, fluffy, del...wait, something was wrong. With a mouthful of biscuit I said, "Um this is..." and I looked into the eyes of my fellow breakfasters and I saw it then for the very first time. In their eyes there was a silent message that nobody had the heart to speak within the confines of that town even when Jimmy wasn't around. The message in their eyes was, "Shh, don't say anything, we've been protecting Jimmy for decades from the reality that his biscuits are absolutely terrible."

"Um this is...delicious." I said, joining in on the long-held lie. I would learn in the course of the following hours from a few brave souls who dared pierce the legend that Jimmy was actually a pretty awful outdoorsman all around. Every time he "led" a trip of campers the town conspired to make sure there was a responsible, knowledgeable, capable, experienced camper to go along just to make sure he didn't catch anything on fire or advise someone to eat poisonous berries from the woods or something. But nobody – to a person, nobody – ever pierced town lore because Jimmy was a sweet person whose identity was built on a fragile untruth and because he had all the gear they wanted to borrow.

You see, having everything you need to get the job done is overrated. Any golfers here? Have any of you ever known another golfer whose garage looked like a pro shop? They've got a driver in every degree of loft, irons with steel shafts and irons with graphite shafts, a long grip putter, a conventional putter, woods with offset heads, the latest in sand wedge technology, three different kinds of spikes to go in four different pairs of golf shoes, a carrying bag, a cart bag, fourteen umbrellas, nine of those telescoping ball retrievers they'll never need to use, because they've also got 9,000 sleeves of golf balls, a drawer full of those magnetic bracelets that will cure your swing and your arthritis at the same time, a bucket full of regular tees, a handful of those cupped tees (which are against the rules by the way), and a corner stacked high with swing training devices as seen on tv. Have any of you known that person? Is that person here by chance? Now, answer this: how good is that person at golf? Terrible!

I know that person is terrible at golf because everybody is terrible at golf. That stuff you see on TV is highly edited by the golf industry to make us all believe the game is *possible*! Yes, some people are a little better than others at the game, and yes, some of those people have good equipment that saves a stroke or two, but it isn't the equipment that helped them rise to the inspirational level of mediocre golfer. Having everything you need isn't everything you need.

Since my own golf equipment has now become something of a legend for exactly the opposite reason – a bit sparse and notably not state of the art, I'll bring the example a little closer to home. Anybody ever known someone with a garage full of tools that couldn't hang a picture straight or change a tire? Having all you need to get the job done isn't all you need to get the job done.

“[So rejoice,]” says Jesus to the seventy sent into the world, “[not in the fact that you have been given the authority, the ability, the tools you need to get the job done.]” This is not what has made your mission successful. What has made your mission of redemption successful is that you, just like those you serve have been grafted into a worldwide community that continually leans into scarcity and vulnerability and finds abundance within.

We could get caught in a loop in our gospel lesson this morning. Its end dovetails perfectly into its beginning. After the seventy have been out on their mission preparing the way for Jesus to come they return to him absolutely full of fascination with the tools of their trade notably power and authority, a couple of tools that have to be handled with immense care. They are absolutely giddy, yes, somewhat about what they’ve accomplished, but more so with what they’ve used to accomplish it – *power*. It is to these kids-in-a-candy-store that Jesus directs his admonition to find their joy not in the mode, especially not in *that* mode, but in the result and in the *source* of their accomplishment, namely the drawing near of the realm of God.

That reminder brings them back to the peculiar way in which Jesus sent them out in the first place. He told them to pack light for a long journey, to take no provisions but rely on the hospitality of those they encountered. He told them to be ready for rejection and potentially danger among the “wolves.” He told them to arrive not as saviors, not as people with the answers, not as itinerant do-gooders, not as economic incentivizers, not as any of the things we believe we are supposed to greet the troubled world with today. He told them to arrive as guests with nothing in their hands and nothing more to offer than their own citizenship in a kingdom that works in a remarkably different way than the one they’re in. Vulnerability it turns out is the vehicle of their success. It is only in their having nothing, bringing nothing, lacking all they need to accomplish their mission that what they need is given to them.

It is true. We do not have everything we need to do the work God has called us to. Thanks be to God, that’s where the mission begins.

Amen.