

Community  
By Kate Satterstrom

July 3, 2022  
First Presbyterian Church  
McMinnville, Oregon

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

*After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'*

...

*"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."*

*The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. Indeed, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

The classic text when talking about missions and sharing the gospel message of Jesus...is not this text. We typically turn to Matthew 28 where we hear The Great Commission. In The Great Commission Jesus instructs his followers to "GO"! And

while The Great Commission is...well...great, it can be a bit daunting. The Great Commission seems to be particularly extrovert focused. Frankly, I can much more to relate to these words from Luke 10.

In our passage Jesus sends out his apostles, his followers who have been training under him. Jesus is their rabbi—or teacher—who they are learning from. He sends them out in pairs to go into communities where Jesus is later planning to go. They are the prep team. They are there to get to know people and get a feel for the lay of the land. As he is sending them out, he prefaces it by reminding them that there is a lot of work to be done, a lot of places to go, a lot of people to meet. So don't get bogged down in the weeds. Keep your head down and find the people that welcome you in.

Jesus instructs those he is sending to greet people with peace, *shalom*. The word *shalom* is significant. It's a word that does some heavy lifting. In a single word we send greetings to people we encounter. We can use it to say hello and goodbye. We bestow blessing and wishes for peace to be upon someone. But *shalom* can also be used to express the intention that someone has. Greeting a person with *shalom* conveys that the person comes with the intention to create harmony, tranquility, wholeness. By greeting people with peace, Jesus' apostles are both establishing that they come in peace and conveying that they bring a message of a new radical peace—the transcendent peace of Christ.

If the people they encounter accept the greeting of peace, they are to stay. Stay in their house. Become part of their community. Eat the food that is customary for where they are staying. Eat the same food as the people they are staying with. Heal their sick. Share with them that the Kingdom of God is near. The apostles are to teach what they have learned from their rabbi.

And what happens if they offer greetings of peace and the peace is not returned? Move on. You have tried to share the peace you have with them. There is a lot to do. There is no need to stay where you are not welcomed.

So, Jesus' apostles went out. In pairs they went to different communities. They offered peace and built relationships. They healed the sick and told of the Kingdom of God. And eventually they make their way back to Jesus. The apostles return recounting their experiences. Jesus you'll never believe what happened.

Jesus, evil fell like lightning. Jesus, the things that normally stand in our way, fell to the wayside. Pair by pair, they shared their stories of the communities they visited, the miracles they witnessed, the people they built relationships with. I imagine the energy and excitement as they swapped stories. Laughter, tears, comparing experiences, breathtaking remembrances. This time of sharing feels tangible. I know this moment. I've felt this moment. Jesus gathers them in, listens to their stories, gives them all the time they need to reflect on their experiences. And he gently reminds them: "remember it is God who is doing a good work through you".

When people ask me what my favorite part of my job is, it is easy for me to answer. My favorite part of my job is the people; the relationships I get to build with people. I get to cheer on teens at sports. I get to walk along side people as they face illnesses. I get to celebrate major milestones. For me, ministry is a gift of relationships. And when I read Luke 10 what I hear, is Jesus calling us to be in relationship with people.

But, it can be daunting to think about sharing the message of Jesus. What will people say? What will people think? What will people do? How will I be received? Gratefully, the message we hear in Luke is not that we must go and hit people over the head with message of Jesus. No, we are called to be in relationship with people. We share the message of Jesus by sharing meals with one another. We share the message of Jesus by walking along side people when they are sick. We share the message of Jesus by being good neighbors and community members. We share the message of Jesus by working alongside each other. We share the message of Jesus by living out the *shalom* of Jesus.

The last few months have been heavy with news of war in Ukraine, shootings of children and people shopping at grocery stores. A pride festival was the target of supremacist groups. This past week the Supreme Court has handed down divisive rulings about guns, abortion, earth care, and prayer. Congress is sharing their findings as they look into the events of January 6. A truck filled with migrants was found with over 50 of the migrants having died because of heat and lack of basic supplies. We are still living in a pandemic. It can be hard to talk of peace when everything feels heavy and divisive. But this is exactly the reason why Jesus sent out his apostles. He sent them out bearing the message of radical peace to communities facing their own strife. Communities that needed healing.

Communities experience evil. Communities who were hurting. Jesus doesn't send them with a litmus test: What do you think about abortion? Who did you vote for county commissioner? Do you believe in vaccines? No. No. No. None of this. Jesus sent them out to proclaim peace and to be in relationship with people. And he reassured them that he, Jesus, was coming to do the heavy lifting. We are to go out proclaiming peace. We are to go out and be in relationship with those in our community day in and day out. We are to go and live out the message of Jesus that we have been taught.

This summer I have set the goal of reading all the Lord of the Rings books. I started this past week with the Hobbit. In the Hobbit, Bilbo Baggins—the hobbit—is invited along on an epic journey, something that is very much outside his comfort zone. I haven't finished yet, I'm about halfway through. What has stood out to me so far is that Bilbo hasn't been training for this journey, he doesn't have all the answers. Gandalf just showed up at his house and said, we need *you* for this journey. And each obstacle Bilbo faces along the way he says something to the extent of "I don't know what to do, but I'll figure it out". This too is how we are called into ministry as Christians. We don't have to have all the answers. We don't know what obstacles will come our way. But we are told to share the story of the gospel through the way we live. We are told to be in relationship with one another. We are told to show up. We are told to share the peace of Christ. Our journeys of faith will take us in different directions. Our journeys won't all look the same. But we are each uniquely gifted with talents and skills. Jesus will meet us in our work.

So as you leave the sanctuary know that you are equipped for ministry. The ministry of proclaiming peace. The ministry of being in relationship with those in our community. The ministry of walking along side our neighbors in sickness. The ministry of celebrating each other's achievements. The ministry of teaching. The ministry of being present. You are uniquely equipped.