

“The God Who Sends”

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go” (Luke 10:1).

So far this year, 15 children have been baptized at our font, and in each case, the baptismal liturgy concluded with the announcement that, “Through baptism God has added Hudson (or Carson or Brooklyn or Cooper) to His own people, to declare the wonderful deeds of our Savior, who has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9). This proclamation draws on words from I Peter to make the bold statement that in the miracle of baptism God calls us. He calls us out of darkness and into light, He calls us out of death and into life, He calls us out of sin and into Christ; and we also learn from this passage, that in baptism we are called to action! Here, Peter tells us in no uncertain terms that we have been called to proclaim, to tell what Christ has done, to announce with our lips and our lives that, in Jesus, the kingdom of God has come near! And this is the same the call we hear into today’s Gospel lesson from Luke 10.

Today, as we consider a reading in which Jesus sends 72 disciples to go ahead of Him, we need to recognize that this sending is not unique. In fact, throughout the Bible God reveals Himself as the One who “sends.” Abraham is sent to a land of promise, Moses is sent to free God’s people from slavery, the Apostles are sent to baptize and teach, Saul is sent to preach Christ to the gentiles, and we also have, as Peter says, been sent to “declare the wonderful deeds of our Savior.” This is part of who we are in Christ; it is our identity as disciples of Jesus. Just like the 72, we have been called and, just like the 72, we have been sent. This *is* the Christian life – “sending” is not arbitrary and it is not optional. So, why is it so difficult for us to go?

Well, listen again to some of the instructions Jesus gives to the 72 and it may give you a hint. Jesus said, “I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road” (Luke 10:3-4). And later in the text Jesus says, “whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town” (Luke 10:10-12).

When I listen to these words from Jesus, I’m struck by the urgent and uncomfortable nature of His call and, even as Jesus tells His disciples about the miraculous signs they will perform, you can’t help but notice the reality of the rejection they will face. It’s true that some people would receive their message, but others would curse their presence and reject their proclamation. For the 72 disciples, the context of the call was clear: Jesus was sending them ahead to prepare people for His visit; to announce that, in Jesus, the kingdom of God had come. But today, for us disciples, this is a challenging reading and the context for Christ’s call on our lives looks vastly different from the situation described in Luke 10. So, how then, are we supposed to apply and respond to our “sending God” today?

Well, the first thing we need to know is that we have been appointed by God. This word is used in the first verse of today’s text and we need to understand what it means. As we hear this term it probably conjures up a number of different definitions that change with the context, but the Greek verb Luke chose for verse one is a word that carries the weight of an official declaration that the “one appointed” has received some kind of office or power. It is a word of legal proclamation and the only time it’s used in the Bible is right here in this passage.

The “appointment” described in this verse is precisely the kind of divine action that we witness in the miracle of baptism, and through our baptism into Christ and through the Word of Christ in the Gospel and in His Body and Blood given and shed for us, God has declared us righteous! He has forgiven our sins! He has proclaimed us to be new creations! He has given us eternal life! And we are only here today, because God has acted first. You see, life in Christ has never been our idea. This is hard a truth for us to accept, but deep down we cling to the conviction that our lives are our own to do with as we please, and that our life is the sum of our choices. But we have been loved unconditionally, and we have been summoned to faith, and being disciples of Jesus Christ was never our work – it was always God! In one way or another, you are here today because God has found you in your sin, called you to life, and with His promise He has appointed you...and today, you are being sent.

Jesus told the 72, “The harvest is plentiful.” In a culture where more and more people are disconnected from the Christ and the life He brings, this statement is still true today, and it is into this harvest field that we have been sent as people baptized and appointed by God. Your life was redeemed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God the Father has called you through your Baptism into Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you have been sent ahead to proclaim that the “kingdom of God is near.” Those statements are true. They describe who you are in Jesus and they are non-negotiable. *So, what does all of this mean?* It means that wherever you are, you have been sent by God. And it also means that wherever you go, Christ is present!

Remember, the 72 were sent ahead of Jesus. They were not alone! And just as He accompanied them, the living Christ also accompanies you. For some of you, the work to which God has called you will be dramatic. For others, His call may look more mundane, and yet you can be certain that Christ has called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light so that you can declare His wonderful and saving deeds...and in your voice, His voice will be heard, and in your work, His work will be done.

Last week, God sent a team of young people from Emmanuel to South Carolina, and as they went they worked with and proclaimed the kingdom to people they’ve never met and won’t see again until heaven. And in the next week, God will send one of you to listen to a family member who struggles to receive Christ with peace. And in the next week, one of you will be sent by God to reach out with a card or phone call to a neighbor struggling with the loss of loved one. And, in the next week, one of you will speak God’s comfort to a friend who is preparing to send a child to college. And in the next week, one of you will be sent to share a word of peace to a co-worker who is bound up with anger. And, in the next week, God will send one of you to bring the promise of heaven to a dying friend.

As people appointed by God, in the next week we will all be sent to proclaim the wonderful deeds of our Savior. And you know what...some people will reject you and the God who sent you. But some will receive you and when they receive you, they will receive the God who sent you. And that always makes an eternal difference!

This is the way the risen Christ works...He sends! The Latin word for “send” is “missio.” It’s where we get our word mission. To be “on a mission” doesn’t only mean you go on a servant trip to South Carolina. “Mission” means that you are doing what you are doing, and you are where you are, because of God. To be “on a mission” means nothing more than being sent by God. This truth is truly amazing. Whatever saving work God wants to do in the world, He has chosen to do it through you! He has appointed you and He has sent you and God never sends you alone! Christ is before you...Christ is behind you...Christ is within you...and Jesus Christ will work through you to bring His kingdom near to those in need of His saving grace. Go with His peace of this promise God has to you today, and rejoice that your names are written in heaven. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

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