

A couple of years ago, I had the privilege of going on a mission trip to Nicaragua. We believed God had appointed us to serve that area by training pastors and church leaders who desperately needed theological training, and by bringing the Gospel to a people whose leaders are becoming growingly resistant to it. It was there where I met this gaggle of young boys, and I believe it is an awesome picture of how someone may be received when they go. The gentlemen directly in front of me was clearly having none of it. He was displeased we were there and had to be coaxed into the picture. He rejected us. The kid immediately to my right was thrilled we were there and was hamming it up every time a camera was raised. He was all in. And then there's the guy in the background. He's a little unsure about it all, so he's hanging back and checking out the scene.

This trip was a faithful response to God's calling on Fellowship. It was made possible by the generosity of our people. And it is an example of what Jesus is building his Church to do and be. We have been called to take the good news of the Gospel to the very ends of the earth. We are sent to labor with God as he gathers souls to himself. But for many Christians, there is a question of who should go, where they should go, and what they should do when they get there. This morning we look at Jesus' words found in Luke 10 to see how we are sent, why we are sent, what is at stake, and what we can expect along the way.

The call is definite. Last week we talked about being salt and light where we live, work, and play. But Jesus' call on the church goes beyond that, to different people in different places.

[Luke 10:1] After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.

“After this?” This passage immediately follows Jesus telling his disciples what it will cost to follow him. They are about to experience that cost. Jesus appoints 72 of his followers to go. “Sent” is based on the same word as “apostle”. These 72 aren't apostles, but they are sent with a commission. They have received their God-given purpose.

Their mission was to prepare the way for Jesus, who will follow them, to prepare the people for the coming and preaching of the Messiah. Our work is to declare the truth about God to others and sensitize them to his drawing them to himself. We declare the truth. God saves.

Notice also that it's 72, not 12. Jesus had previously sent the apostles to do similar work. Now he picks 72. **The work of God's people is an ever-expanding mission that activates more and more Jesus-followers to join in.** The work is not given to just a few professionals, or to an inner-circle. It's given to all who call on his name, and it is to be accomplished together. Jesus sends them two-by-two. Practically, ministry is best done with other brothers and sisters. It provides companionship and protection. Additionally, the Old Testament demands two witnesses to corroborate a claim. Two give testimony about Jesus and testimony about each town's response.

God has appointed all of us to go. We are all missionaries. We are all sent. The question is where and to whom. Last week I asked you “who are your ‘others’”? We focused on those with whom we live, work, and play. But might your God-given purpose also include an appointment to those “out there”, those you have to be sent to?

If you go, what can you expect? **The work is demanding (and maybe dangerous).** The work Jesus calls us to is not easy, nor is it always safe.

[Luke 10:2-3] ² And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.

I don't know about you, but I've never met a lazy farmer. Harvesting is hard work, and Jesus uses that image to express the labor of those he sends. After Jesus commissions the 72, he begins to describe what he's called them to, and the news is challenging. First, Jesus says the harvest is plentiful. Now, we may see that as a positive, that there is lots of opportunity. But what that really means is there are a lot of people who have never heard, who don't know, who Jesus is, and the work of telling them is given to a small number. Just look at the ratios. 36 towns, two each. So Jesus encourages them to pray for God to raise up laborers. But isn't it interesting who he tells to pray. It's the ones already going. They are a partial answer to their own prayers.

This morning I want you to know the harvest is still plentiful, and the workers are still few. I did some research this week and, for the sake of today, I'm rounding numbers. There are about 7 billion people in the world and about 2 billion of them are Christians. That means 5 billion people don't know Jesus. Additionally, 56,000,000 die worldwide every year. That means, if we use the same ratio, 40,000,000 of those are non-Christians. That's 1.25/second, 1,800 during this sermon. If you believe the words of Jesus, if you believe the Bible, you know they are separated from God for all of eternity.

How does that strike you? Does that stir your heart? Does it break it? The harvest is plentiful because so many don't know Jesus. It's why we go. If you are inclined to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he sends laborers, I want to challenge you to consider that you may be the answer to your own prayer the same way the 72 were an answer to their own prayer.

Harvesting can also be dangerous. Jesus says he sends them out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Those who work to make an impact for Jesus have always faced physical and spiritual resistance, and Jesus wants them to know he is aware of it before they go. We know this struggle ourselves. We have a team leaving for India in less than a week to continue our work w Deven. There are several people who have come to faith in Christ and they want to be baptized by our team when they get there. Unfortunately, India has a no conversion law, and it's illegal to baptize someone. So our team risks arrest if they go through with it. Additionally, some of our ministry partners here this morning face resistance. They have been sent to places hostile to the Gospel. To maintain a low profile, the literature at their tables don't include their last names, and they can't be photographed. That is the reality Jesus sends us in to.

Now, you may think I'm a terrible salesman. “Kurt, why would you tell us such things beforehand?” Because Jesus did, and none of the 72 opted out. Their call was certain. Their appointment was divine. It's important for us to know that, should we go and experience resistance, it's not an accident. It's not a failure of the plan or of God. It's exactly what Jesus said would happen. And it may even be a sign we're doing exactly what Jesus called us to.

It also confronts the growing American cultural value of safety. We mitigate risk in all areas of our lives. We are so opposed to adversity that the idea of going out on a demanding and dangerous mission may be a non-starter for us. **But Jesus has not called us to safety. He's called us to sacrifice.** He says, "follow me", and when you follow Jesus, you inevitably end up at the Cross. It doesn't mean we're reckless, it means we're willing. But don't miss that the one who sends us out as sheep is the one who calls himself the Good Shepherd. He makes the same promise to us that God has made to his followers since the beginning: "I will be with you." If we truly believe that, we'll have the faith and courage to go.

The laborer is dependent. There is no such thing as a self-sufficient missionary.

[Luke 10:4-8] ⁴ Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you.

Why does Jesus send them out this way? For reasons both practical and relational. Jesus has a sense of urgency and wants them to be able to move with pace. Martha and I just bought a new, giant suitcase so that, when we travel, we can pack every single possible thing we might need for our adventure. It's convenient, but it also weighs us down. Jesus says take nothing and go.

Relationally, sent laborers go having to trust that Jesus will provide. It's an act of faith that grows them spiritually. It is an outward expression of their internal acceptance of the message they are sent to declare. It's a reminder that, just as we depend on Jesus for our physical needs, we are completely reliant on his to make our ministry fruitful.

Dependence also allows us to connect relationally to those we are sent to. It would be very easy to show up as the one with all the answers, leaving us on unequal footing. But dependence on those we serve, and the breaking of bread with them, keeps us as equals. We remain humble in the presence of someone who is caring for us physically while we care for them spiritually.

In Nicaragua, there was a local woman that cooked our breakfast and dinner every day. She didn't take our order beforehand, and we were thrilled to eat whatever she put before us. She also kept her eye on me to make sure I left some for the rest of the group. The week ended with us hugging her and taking pictures with her. We connected through our dependence and her care.

I want you to know that, when you give to Fellowship, you are part of the provision Jesus talks about here. While you are not the ones being ministered to, you give what our 24 ministry partners faithfully wait on Jesus to provide. And if you go, don't be afraid to ask others for support. People are eager to bless you and are fulfilled by materially participating in the mission.

The message is declared. Each of the 72 are sent to tell others the very same thing.

[Luke 10:9-12] ⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ ‘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.’ ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

The message of those Jesus sends is to declare the good news that he has come. The 72 were to tell that the Kingdom of God had come near in the person of Jesus. Ours is to preach that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. This is not a secret message that only a few have been given the ability to declare. It is a message to be given by all who have trusted in Christ. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have believed that Jesus died for your sins and rose again. **That is the message you have been given to give to others.** Like the picture of the boys in Nicaragua, some will accept your message, some will reject it, and some will hang back against the fence and contemplate. The results are up to God. Our responsibility is to go and tell.

The reward is delight. If I told you I have an offer you can’t refuse, and then described it as a venture where you would have to do a lot with very little, be exposed to danger, be without resources and completely dependent on others, and likely rejected by many, would you take it? How do you think you’d feel and act when you returned?

[Luke 10:17-20] ¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” ¹⁸ And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

When the 72 return, it’s clear they have had success in their mission, and they are fired up. They have cast out demons and they have very likely have had a positive response to their message. The toil of the harvest has been beyond worth it. God bore fruit in their faithful ministry.

But notice how Jesus checks them by saying “don’t rejoice in this.” Now, I don’t think Jesus is saying you can’t rejoice in fruitful ministry. Few things are more thrilling than to see God move through you for the blessing of others and for his glory. But I believe Jesus gives us a warning because fruitful ministry can become an idol. If we are not careful, we can start valuing the mission over the Messiah, the work of the Kingdom over a relationship with the King.

The greatest miracle, and the greatest source of joy, is a saved sinner. Jesus says rejoice, first and foremost, that your names are written in heaven. **Before you were sent you were saved.** Rejoice in your salvation, because when you do, that joy will inspire you to go and tell others the good news of the Gospel so that they too may experience that very same joy, found only in Christ.