

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Wairua tapu Holy Spirit welcome - be in this place and in these words. Amen

In today's gospel, as Jesus and his disciples are journeying to Jerusalem, he sets out what his mission is, its end point ('the harvest') and how his disciples will participate in this. They are to go ahead of Jesus and heal the sick and tell them "the Kingdom of God is near". It's learning on the job. They are given a **roadmap for discipleship and mission**

That's the big picture- let's dig into the detail of this passage, and see how it might guide us as disciples on mission.

This story speaks of the seventy – not the usual 12 we think we think of as Jesus' core group of disciples - there were more whom Jesus sent out. This was a kind of "internship," a training time while Jesus was still with them – note the reference to paying your interns - thinking of some of our mega churches - the worker deserves their pay. Thanks

What did this mission look like? - Simple. Their mission was the *same as Jesus' own ministry*: "heal the sick" and tell them the good news that 'the kingdom of God has come near to you.'" Interesting, I think that it comes in that order- do the work first, in God's name, show his power, and then they'll be ready to listen. For us, Healing can be simply building others up in body mind and spirit, serving them with the love which comes from God. And through prayer which has the power to change things we can't in our strength. We share in making people whole.

We do this already through our weekly intercessions, and I thank God for this congregation and their faithfulness in this ministry. You may have noticed the name Jasper on the list - that's my 1 year old grandson who has had a chronic chest condition and difficulties in breathing for months since he contracted RSV that was doing the rounds as a small baby...and some of you know about my regular commute to Auckland- my other .5 role to help the family out as both parents work full time and Jasper had to be taken out of day care. On my last visit –praise God - he was getting back to his usual cheery self, as he wasn't struggling to breathe all the time.

Back to the healing work of Jesus' disciples. Note he sends them "ahead of him ... to every town and place where he himself intended to go." His seventy emissaries will announce his coming by giving people a preview. It is also a preview of the ministry Jesus gives us today. We go "ahead of him," bringing the good news. But still - ministry may be risky and difficult, as we push ourselves out of our comfort zones. Of course it's not so much what we do, but what God does in and through us, as he calls us to go out. Because, although Jesus may not be physically among us, he is present and empowers us through his Spirit - he will follow up if we step out in faith.... And sometimes we find that Jesus has actually gone before us - the ground is already prepared for us to continue to plant and nurture growth.

Note also they are to travel "in pairs." We think of groups doing mission work door-to-door, always with two people, such as the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. We can assume that Jesus' directive is for *safety and for mutual encouragement*. If you have to do something dangerous or risky, you want to have somebody with you. It's also a sign that "we're in this together" as followers of Jesus. There should be no lone ranger Christians.

"The harvest is plentiful" is as true today as it was in Jesus' time. However, the fastest growing group in terms of religious affiliation are those with no faith – we know this from census information. And I've quoted Bishop Ellie to some of you before that Wellington is the most secular city in the world according to a recent international survey among the 18 – 38year olds age group. I'm telling you

Wellington -especially parts of central Wellington- is a mission field!"But for those who claim some sort of faith in our culture is that people come up with their own religious views, their belief in God might be more individualistic or a new age expression. It's all about you! Because you deserve it ...

Maybe there are people you know who say: "I believe in God. I can't remember the last time I went to church but ... It's just trying to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. And, I suppose, take care of each other. " A well-meaning religiosity but a bit do-it-yourself - (I'm tempted to say it's a number 8 wire approach but that undermines the inherent creativity and ingenuity of that approach.) It's more a mish-mash of religious views, often from strands of many religions.... I believe these are the people Jesus is sending us out to today.

Now Jesus warned the seventy to expect resistance and rejection, and it's the same today. More Christians are being persecuted for their faith today than at any other time in human history, including the Roman persecutions of the first century. If not persecution, we might meet indifference of those in our increasingly secular society. And right wing Christians in America and closer to home sadly give Christianity a bad name. You may have friends who gave up going to church because they don't need all that anymore. Or more likely in my case friends who never felt the need in the first place and wonder why you do.

In fact it was that attitude that was part of God's calling me to ministry – with some people I worked with even asked me - I would say because I want to talk or think more about God than road realignments which I'd be writing speeches about for the Minister of Transport. Worthy initiatives of course, but I believed there was more to life– or there was more that I could be doing...My motivating verse of scripture is still John 10 – 10 – the abundant life Jesus promised – I like the message version " I came so they can have real and eternal life..." That's ongoing new life, starting in the here and now, the kingdom that we get a taste of once we join forces with God in working towards the harvest.

Back to our gospel reading: the nuts and bolts of mission: Jesus 'advice on mission was to travel light." In our terms the equivalent advice would be, tooth brush and comb, maybe a change of clothes, but don't let 'stuff 'get in the way of ministry of the gospel. And once you find open minded people, work with them. Don't shop around for the best hospitality.

Notice also how Jesus only tells them what they should do - not anything about measuring their success. If people don't accept your message, he says, shake their dust off your feet and move on. In our congregations it's difficult to avoid measuring success. We live with membership figures, giving levels, budgets, annual reports, and so on. It's very easy to measure our work by these figures — and that's how many people will measure our ministry — but that's contrary to this text.

Is there a note of surprise in the report the seventy bring back to Jesus? Isn't that because they didn't know or expect what would happen? Isn't that like our ministry, when we are surprised what happens as a result of our work? What we do and say is about him and from him.

We are not to rejoice about our success in our various ministries, but to rejoice "that your names are written in heaven," that is, that we are part of this kingdom of God by telling and **being** the good news. We cooperate in his coming Kingdom by becoming his hands and feet –we are the workers who are needed for the harvest, which is plentiful, fruitful – a reward in itself where blessings abound. I can assure you, ministry is a gift from God – and we are blessed to be a blessing (as God promised Abram back in Genesis 12 –if he left his homeland, stepping out of his comfort zone).

Finally, to quote St. Teresa of Avila's reminder that we carry on the ministry that Jesus gave us: 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.

- *Catherine Froud, 3 July 2022*