

Luke 10:1-12, 16-20 –¹After 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. ²He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. ³Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ⁴Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

⁵"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' ⁶If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. ⁷Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

⁸"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. ⁹Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' ¹⁰But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ¹¹'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' ¹²I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. . . .

¹⁶"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

¹⁷The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

¹⁸He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Introduction – Picture yourself getting ready for a trip. Maybe it's your summer vacation to visit relatives. Maybe it is a camping trip up north. There is a lot of work to do before you go, right? You need to think about what you are going to pack. When you pack you need to think about what you are planning on doing and what supplies you are going to need. You also need to think about unforeseen events you might encounter, such as bad weather, someone getting hurt, or car problems.

Jesus sent 72 of his disciples on a trip. On this trip they were supposed to bring people advance warning of Jesus coming. As Jesus was approaching the city of Jerusalem for the last time in his life, the 72 disciples were to go two by two and tell people, "The kingdom of God is near!" But they weren't supposed to pack anything. They were just supposed to go. Go ahead and depend on total strangers to become their friends, invite them in and feed them while they served as messengers of our Savior Jesus Christ.

I would think that would be a tough trip to make. The uncertainty of what was going to happen. How were people going to treat them? People in Nazareth once tried to throw Jesus off a cliff because they were upset with his message. Would people get violent with these pairs of disciples? Jesus didn't give them any guarantee of a welcome reception. But he did give them the promise that, even though they would be going out ahead of Jesus, they would be provided for, that God himself was watching over them.

God has given us the same basic task as the 72 disciples. They were part of the church then; we are part of the church now. What is our task? "Go!" "Go and make disciples of all nations." It is our responsibility, but we did not come up with it. God is the one who sends us to go and make disciples of all nations. And we can be confident today that:

Since God is Sending, He Will Provide!

I. God provides the Workers

II. God provides the Resources

III. God provides the Message

I. God Provides the Workers

Jesus says that the job of going and making disciples is urgent. He emphasizes that by using the illustration of the farmer and his fields. "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*" Stand in the shoes of the farmer who has acres upon acres of ripe corn to pick, but it all has to be picked by hand and there are just not enough people to help pick the corn before it starts to rot or freeze.

Jesus had 72 willing people who went out to the fields to proclaim the message of Jesus' coming. But the world was a lot bigger at that time than just the villages that Jesus was going to be visiting. Many more people were needed to carry out the task. As time went on, the number of workers multiplied. Those sent out spread the message of the kingdom of God after Jesus had ascended into heaven and the church has grown and prospered, in spite of attacks from those who

close their ears to the Words of Jesus and even in spite of the temptations of worldly wealth and power. And how blessed we are that workers have gone out into the harvest field and proclaimed God's Word to us and our families and friends.

We are confident that God will continue to provide workers for the fields that are ripe and ready for the Word of God. But even though we are confident that God will provide, Jesus says "*Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.*"

One of the great mysteries of prayer is that God will carry out his will for the good of the church, with or without our asking for it and yet he commands us to pray that his work be done among us and through us. Jesus' statement still holds true today, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.*" There are never enough people sharing the message of Christ coming to this world to do all that was necessary to save us from endless pain and sorrow. So pray that God would lead men to dedicate their lives to proclaiming the gospel full time as pastors. Pray that God would lead men and women to dedicate their lives to proclaiming the gospel full time in teaching and other ministries. Pray that God would make you willing to be a worker in the harvest field, not necessarily full time, but working wherever and however you are able. "If you cannot speak like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, you can say he died for all."

When you think about the fact that you are sometimes afraid of speaking about Christ's love and you have doubts about whether or not you know your Bible well enough and you maybe have been unwilling to be either accepted or rejected for the sake of your Savior, then remember that Christ your Savior has suffered so that your unwilling heart and lips will not condemn you. He has made you his representatives, not because you are worthy, but in spite of the fact that none of us are worthy.

We Christians who are working in the harvest field of souls, ripe and ready for hearing the message of our Savior do not represent ourselves or present a message about ourselves. Christ says, "*He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*" West Allis is ripe to hear God's Word! The people who live in the neighborhoods around church are being affected by the same events of history as we are. They are struggling with the same sins as we are. They have the same need of a Savior that we do. Whether you are in West Allis or New Berlin or another part of the Metro area, consider the need for workers to proclaim the truth that the kingdom of God comes by trusting that Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee is the one who has brought peace between us and God. And if it is clear that God is saying to you, "Go!" to share his love with a certain person in your life, I pray the Holy Spirit will give you a willing heart to respond with eagerness, "Yes, Lord, with you by my side, I am ready and willing to go wherever you lead me and to whomever you lead me."

Consider next weekend's church picnic an opportunity to invite someone to hear the Good News of our Savior proclaimed in a more casual setting. It's a chance for people who may not know what God does for us each day to see and hear how the Holy Spirit has filled your lives with peace and joy as you trust in your Savior through the tough times of life and how you thank God for the good times in life. At the church picnic, why not get to know someone you've never met before instead of just spending time with those you know well? Encourage each other and consider how God might use you to be a blessing to someone else, so that they may be encouraged to share the love of Christ.

II. God Provides the Resources

Willing people, of course, are very important in the work of spreading the Good News about our Savior and the kingdom he has set up and wants all people to be a part of. We need mouths that will speak, hands that will work, and eyes that will see the opportunities. But there are other practical issues that are important to consider as we carry out the mission that God sends us on.

The practical issues were the ones that Jesus told his disciples not to worry about. "Don't take a purse, bag or sandals. Eat and drink whatever they give you." Jesus did not promise a warm reception everywhere, but he implied that some would receive them well and they would have their daily needs taken care of. They shouldn't worry about what to eat or drink or about which supplies to take along, but instead focus on the task of proclaiming the message that the kingdom of God is near! That's also why they weren't supposed to greet anyone along the way. It may distract them from the task of getting to the villages where Jesus was going to be coming.

Kind of a leap of faith, isn't it? Not only to say, "Sure, Lord, I'll go!" But also to say, "I'll find out what I'll eat and wear and have for support when I get there." In the previous chapter of Luke, Jesus encounters some people who say they want to follow Jesus, but want to take care of some things in their lives first and make sure they are prepared. Jesus states, somewhat harshly, that they aren't fit for the kingdom.

Jesus does not ask us to be reckless or careless with our lives and possessions as we serve in his kingdom. But he does warn us about not trusting God to provide for us and not being content with what we have. He warns us about being more concerned about our own lives than about the ripe harvest waiting that needs to hear the word of God. If we worry about getting our house in order before we say, "Use me, Lord, in your harvest field!" we will never be ready. First things first. Reaching people with the message about God taking away the punishment of our sin is always going to be first and

the temporary concerns of our day to day lives will always come second. Our daily needs will always be important while we live here and now, but may they never crowd out our attitude of gratitude to our Savior for his great sacrifice for our sins. May our desire to make his name known in our neighborhoods be a part of our every breath.

At this time of year, we have the opportunity here at Woodlawn to say "Thank you!" to our God that he provides the resources needed for the mission. Our budget year runs from July 1st to June 30th. I say thank you to God, on behalf of us pastors and teachers who work here in full time ministry. Thank you to God for the faith he has given you, that you are willing to sacrifice the blessings God has given you so that we have full time workers who are focused on carrying out the mission of the church. Thank you to God that you have been willing, in difficult economic times, to support the ministry of this congregation, which shares the gospel in West Allis, supports Wisconsin Lutheran High School and the Prep Schools of our Wisconsin Synod, and in essence, supports the message of God's kingdom throughout the US and the World, training workers and supporting mission work. Because God provides for us, we, as a congregation, owe no one any money. We have been able to accomplish most of what we set out to accomplish in our 2009-2010 budget year. This is no small miracle in a world that so often focuses on day to day needs and longs to spend money on short term pleasure. Thank you and praise God for your hearts that long to hear the Word of God and desire that all people would hear it.

As soon as Jesus said, "*Don't take a purse or bag or sandals*" and said that you may or may not have a place to stay and eat, I would have been very tempted to say, "*I don't think so, Lord. I'm way too cautious a person to take that kind of risk.*" But the power of God's promise to provide for us is greater than our own doubt and fear. Has God ever led you to go where most people would be afraid to go? Have you been led to serve in a way that seemed way too risky, but God provided the resources you needed?

Only because God provided the resources were the founders of Woodlawn able to organize this congregation more than 80 years ago. Only because God provides the resources are we still here today, proclaiming that the kingdom of God has come to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Trust that God will provide. May the Holy Spirit guide all of our hearts so that we seek first his kingdom in every decision of our lives.

III. God provides the Message

Throughout the history of the church and throughout the history of Woodlawn, there has always been a mixed reception when God sends his people out. The message has always been the same: The kingdom of God is near. The kingdom comes when people are brought to faith through the good news about our Savior. But some hear about Jesus and rejoice and God fills their lives with eternal peace and joy and others hear about the kingdom and refuse to believe. God's messengers shake the dust off their feet, reminding those who reject the word that the message is true whether they believe it or not. Jesus says it will be more bearable for the wicked people of the ancient city of Sodom who never saw the fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior, than for those who hear that the Savior has come but they don't want him.

Jesus never promised that the work of proclaiming the kingdom of God would be easy. Some days you may feel like a lamb among wolves that seem intent on destroying the faith that God has put in your heart. Maybe some days it seems like our relatively small congregation is like a lamb, surrounded by people who want Christians to change their beliefs or keep quiet. But even though Jesus is pretty clear that it isn't easy to go and proclaim the message of God's grace, he does promise that God will provide the workers, and the resources, and the message. He has our back. So, although we may worry at times about how this will all turn out, God reminds us that all is in his hands, so we don't have to worry. What we already have through Christ is so much more valuable than anything we might willingly give up so that people can hear that God has come and rescued us. Listen again to what Jesus told the 72 apostles he sent out. "*I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*"

When the powerful message of God's Word scatters the lies of the demons, those spiritual snakes and scorpions, and people's eyes are opened to see the love God showed us by sending his Son, what a wonderful reason to rejoice. There is rejoicing in heaven when lost souls are brought safely into the kingdom of God. But always remember that it is not *our* power that saves. Success is wonderful in our mission, but it is not *our* success. It is God's grace that saves *us*. It is God's grace that saves *anyone*. Rejoice that *your names* are written in heaven, because of the love of Jesus Christ for you. With your name already written there, you have every reason to believe that God will provide for you until you are with him forever. Amen.