

JULY 3, 2022 – HARVEST

Our Gospel today comes from Luke 10: 1-12

So today, we find ourselves in the 10th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, and Jesus has turned His face to Jerusalem.

For about three years now, He's been traveling around with a ragtag crew of not only His 12 apostles but many other disciples who are drawn to the message.

They have seen many things.

They have witnessed miracles, amazing preaching, all summed up with, "The kingdom of God is upon you right here, right now," a message first proclaimed at the banks of the Jordan by John the Baptist and later picked up by Jesus of Nazareth, and without changing even a little bit of it, carried all the way through Calvary up to this day.

"The kingdom of God is upon you right here, right now," a radical message at the time, a message that continues to be radical to this day.

"The kingdom of God is upon you right here, right now."

Now, up to this point in Judaism, the idea of God for the Jewish people was all about **Temple worship**.

It was all about following the **law** and making your sacrifice.

That was the way one could be righteous in the eyes of God, if you toed the line, if you followed the rules, and the idea that the kingdom of God is upon you right here, right now, well, that's just crazy.

It certainly did not fit in the box of their understanding because God was hidden behind the curtain in the **Ark of the Covenant, in the Holy of Holies**, and it was only through the Temple officials that you can have any kind of access.

Now, of course, you yourself couldn't actually go into the Holy of Holies.

Only the high priest could do that, and he did it only once a year on the **Feast of Yom Kippur**.

In fact, when he did it, they would tie a rope around his waist. In case he died, they could drag him out.

So, the idea that the kingdom of God is upon you right here and right now and available to you, well, it's stunning, and it remains stunning, but as unusual as his message was, the messenger was also unusual.

Beginning with a crazy man named John the Baptist, a man who had **rejected his father's Levitical priesthood** and moved out into the middle of the desert, the middle of nowhere.

A man who ate locusts and honey, a man who today, I imagine, would probably be committed to a mental institution, proclaiming that the kingdom of God is upon you right here and right now.

And this message, like I said, was picked up by Jesus, son of a carpenter, with zero rabbinical training, but people are calling Him Rabbi, even whispers of Messiah.

And rather than going down to the local seminary and picking out the bright and the best or the best and the bright to help Him carry the message, He chooses common fishermen and tax collectors.

So, from the very beginning, the religious leadership are a bit suspect, but then come the miracles, and my friends, there is nothing more stubborn than a good miracle.

Restoring sight to the blind, paralytics are walking, the dumb are speaking, lepers are cleansed, 5,000 men are fed with five loaves and two fish with leftovers.

Jesus is making big waves, but He's a complete paradox because on one hand, He's obviously from God, given what He's doing, but on the other hand, He has zero respect for the tradition of the elders, and He seems to break Sabbath law repeatedly, not to mention the company He keeps: tax collectors, sinners, Samaritans, even traveling with women, which in those days, unheard of.

So, what to do?

Because now, He's attracting huge crowds, and this is a big problem.

People are coming from all over the place, and they are following Jesus.

Now, I imagine most of them probably didn't really understand Jesus, but they're coming from all over to follow Him for many reasons, I imagine.

I suppose some were simply looking to get their needs met.

If He can heal me, if He can feed me, why not?

Others might have been drawn to the message itself.

You know, try to figure it out because the message was and continues today to be a message of empowerment.

Still others are probably just **curious**, want to see the show.

"The kingdom of God is upon you right here and right now."

This is very exciting, and as I said, they thought maybe He might even be the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Smearred One, the Warrior King who was going to deliver them from Roman oppression.

They had thought that John the Baptist might be the guy, but he had pointed out to Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."

So, with that, let's look at our Gospel today.

"At that time, the Lord appointed 72 others, whom He sent ahead of Him in pairs to every town and village He intended to visit."

So here we go.

Game time.

Jesus is sending His disciples out to carry the message.

Today, we would call this a **mission trip**.

They are sent out to carry the message, and that is what I would like to talk to you about today.

What does Jesus teach us in regards to carrying the message?

And why, for the most part, do we get this so wrong?

But before we get into the particulars, let's look at the message itself.

Albert Einstein once said, "I want to know the thoughts of God. The rest are details."

Now, understand the thoughts of God, the mind of God, can be found in the best-selling Book that nobody reads.

It's called the Bible, which stands for **Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth**.

If you want to know what God's up to, read His Word.

I remember, when I was growing up, I always kind of thought that the Bible was just a collection of notes that the disciples had been taking while they were following Jesus.

You know, they all kept journals, and after the Ascension, they got together and compared notes and wrote it all down.

But that is not what happened.

Theologians have spent lifetimes trying to piece together exactly how the Scriptures, which is the message, came together, and what they come up with is, well, complicated.

Kind of like life itself, it's messy.

We are talking about mission.

We are talking about how do we carry the message?

And to answer that question, let's get into the way back machine and go way back to the beginning.

After Jesus had ascended and then sent us the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the very first people to carry the message were the apostles, and a man named Paul, and it was all word of mouth.

What they call oral tradition, and the message was carried by, well, in the beginning, eyewitnesses, and then came Paul, formerly known as Saul.

Paul had been a Pharisee who was actively persecuting this new movement, which at the time was known as the Way, but after getting knocked off his high horse, he becomes the hardest-working preacher of all time.

Now, his letters, often referred to as the Pauline letters, which appear after the Gospels in the Bible, were actually written before the Gospels.

Now, Scripture scholars believe that the first Gospel that was written was the Gospel of Mark, which is by far the shortest Gospel.

It is the skeleton upon which Matthew, who's writing to a Jewish audience, and Luke, who's writing to a Greek audience, would later build upon. Now, these first three Gospels are often referred to as the synoptic Gospels. **Synoptic** is a Greek word, and it means one eye because while the details might slightly differ, they all view the Jesus event through a singular lens.

And then came the Gospel of John, and well, John just kind of threw out the notes and started all over. The Gospel of John is very different than the first three Gospels.

The Gospel of John comes out of a small, isolated group called the **Johannine** community, who had separated themselves from the mainstream church, called the **Petrine** community.

Now, the founder of the Johannine community was thought to be the beloved disciple John, who Scripture scholars believe was the youngest of all the disciples, which would explain why he won the resurrection marathon.

Now, anyway, getting back to the Gospel of John, it's much more theological than the previous three. What that means is that rather focusing on exactly what happened, the Gospel of John is much less interested in getting the chronology just right and much more interested into why it happened.

What does it mean to me as I try every day to follow Jesus?

But getting back to Paul, reading the Pauline letters, which were written to the early Christian communities that he was founding, it's very much like looking over somebody else's shoulder and reading somebody else's mail.

The basic theme that weaves throughout the Pauline letters is, "Remember what I taught you, and act like you're a believer."

In other words, "This is what it means to follow Jesus."

So, from the very beginning, the message was carried from one person to another.

This is how Christianity began, and truth be told, it's how it continues today.

"The kingdom of God is upon you right here, right now."

It is Jesus who brings us this kingdom. It is Jesus who defeats death.

It is Jesus who restores Eden, but here's the problem: we are called to carry this message into the world, that is true, but Jesus also makes it very clear that we will be persecuted while doing so, and of course, that is true too.

There is nothing easy about being a Christian in our world today, yet we are called to carry this message, and our Gospel today gives us some clues as to how to do this.

"At that time, the Lord appointed 72 others, whom He sent ahead of Him in pairs to every town and place He intended to visit. He said to them, 'The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few, so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for His harvest.'"

Now, I have often heard this particular Scripture used to talk about vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and I have no problem with that.

That's fine, but the problem is this.

It might give us the mistaken impression that somehow carrying the message, somehow laboring for His harvest, is exclusively reserved for clergy, and that's not true.

It's not.

The universal call for evangelization is to every disciple of Christ.

If you want to call yourself a Christian, if you want to wave that flag, you are called to carry His message.

Jesus goes on to say, "Go on your way, and behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves."

That doesn't sound very good, does it?

Lambs among wolves?

That doesn't sound like it's going to work out so well.

Lambs among wolves.

What does that mean?

I mean, when I think of a lamb, I think of vulnerability.

That's a hard word to say, vulnerability, humility, lambs among wolves.

What does that really mean?

Well, let me start by telling what it does not mean.

It does not mean, "Well, you wolves better start acting like lambs, or you're headed towards the smoking section."

It doesn't mean that.

I think one of the big problems as a Church that we have when it comes to carrying the message is it seems like we got a whole lot more porcupines around here than lambs.

We are so quick to judge.

We are so quick to convict, and as lambs, we need to carry the message in a gentle, non-threatening, non-judgmental way.

Just lay it out there.

Let the Holy Spirit do its work.

"Carry no moneybag, no sack, no sandals, and greet no one along the way."

So, let's start with that, "Greet no one along the way." That always bothered me when I was a kid hearing that

because that sounds kind of odd.

"Greet nobody?"

Really, that sounds kind of rude!

That doesn't sound very Christian to me, but I think what He's getting at is simply this.

He is sending out His disciples, which, by the way, are you and I, to carry the message.

This is our mission, and it's very easy for us to get distracted along the way from our mission.

So, it's not like we can't wave, you know, but I think what He's trying to say is, "Don't stop and get involved in the small talk," you know, the pleasantries.

You know, "How's your mother?"

And all that, because it will distract us from our mission. It will keep us from what we are supposed to do.

So, I think when He says, "Greet no one on the way," what He's saying is, "You are on a mission. Stay focused."

"Carry no moneybag, no sack, no sandals."

In other words, "Do not rely on your own provisions. **Put your trust in God**, because He will provide," and that is true.

If you do, He will.

"Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this household,' and if a peaceful person lives there, then your peace will rest on him, but if not, it will return to you."

So, what's that all about?

Well, if you carry the message, you are carrying a message of peace, and the peace that you are carrying is the Holy Spirit, and sometimes, the Holy Spirit is well-received, and sometimes, it is not, and who receives it well?

Well, a peaceful person does, and who does not?

Well, an unpeaceful person does not receive it.

It's that simple, and never let us forget that the peace or lack thereof peace that you find when you get there was determined long before you showed up.

So, let's talk about that unpeaceful man.

"Whatever town you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say, 'The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that, we will shake off against you,'" which, that's a pretty dramatic thing to say.

For whatever reason, Middle Eastern culture has got a thing about feet.

STORY: When President George Bush, Senior was meeting with Saddam Hussein, you know, when we were still friends, he was talking to him, sitting in front of him, and he casually crossed his legs and unintentionally exposed the sole of his foot towards the dictator, not knowing, and this enraged Saddam Hussein so much that he stormed out of the room. It took him 30 minutes for the aides to calm him down and explain it was a mistake.

Years later, a man would throw his shoes at his son during a news conference.

Like I said, they got a thing about feet.

It's the ultimate insult, but the dust that clings to your feet, "Even that, we will shake off against you." What that really means is this: sometimes the message is well-received, and that's okay, but sometimes, the message is not well-received, and that's okay too. Shake it off. You are never going to argue somebody into the faith. You're never going to find just the right words and just the right combination for somebody to have a V8 moment. "Oh, yeah, I get it. I get." No, that's not going to happen, and that's okay, because it's not your job anyway. We're just **Johnny Appleseed**, throwing the seeds of the Good News. It's the Holy Spirit that does the heavy lifting. I remember one time, I was watching the TV, and I saw this preacher. He had his arm around this man. He said, "I brought this man to the Lord," and I'm thinking, "You're not that good." It's the Spirit that does the work. "The kingdom of God is at hand right now, right here." That's the message. How do we carry the message? It's just one person telling another. "Let me tell you about a man named Jesus and what He has done for me. Let em tell you about the peace that He brought me when I had no peace, a peace that goes beyond all human understanding. Perhaps He could do the same for you." That, my friend, is how we are to carry the message, yet what do we do? Remember that?

So many of us wait around in our churches for people to show up, and when they do, we try to help them. You know, we organize a coat drive, or we collect canned goods, school supplies, and, you know, understand, I am not saying this is not a good thing. Charity is a foundational principle of Christianity, okay, but it is not carrying the message, and in case you forgot, the message is, "The kingdom of God is upon you right here, right now, not someday." Now, remember, Luke is writing his Gospel to a mysterious man lost to history named Theophilus. That's a Greek word. It means friend of God. So, if you are a friend of God, Luke is speaking to you, and what he's trying to tell you is to carry the message. Get off the debating society. Get into the game.

"The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few." Time to get busy.

So my friends, once again, how do we carry the message? Well, it starts with waking up to the fact that it's really not you. It's the Holy Spirit that is working through you and all around you, whether you see it or not. Just step outside, and the chances are pretty good that it won't be too long before you run into a sheep that's wandering in circles. And as you look into their eyes as they're sharing with you a story of pain coming from living in a fallen world with uncertainty, with fear, just kind of stop yourself, pray for courage. Look at them, and say, "You know, I've been where you are before, and I know the way out. Let me tell you about a man, Jesus. I cried out of my suffering, and He brought me peace. It's a peace that goes beyond all human understanding, and it's a peace that continues to rest upon me to this day. Perhaps He could do the same for you."

If you've decided to do the Psalms with us there will be an Adult Education Voice Mail with the weekend attachments. Enjoy your 4th. Be a Blessing.

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