

The Joy of the Mission

Passage: Luke 10:1-24 | From the series: Luke

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My first job out of college I worked for an educational non-profit that was actually a part of the Americorps, Clinton's domestic peace corps. We had a mission statement: to be agents of whole school change. Do you know what that means?? Me neither. But newly graduated from college, a young squeaky 22 year old, I found myself in meetings with principals and veteran teachers and I had to be the one to talk about how to achieve whole school change. I was so far over my head that I wondered why the Lord would send me of all people.

Have you ever had a similar experience? Have you ever been handed something so far over your head that you wondered why the Lord would send you of all people??

I was supposed to be an **agent** of whole school change.

Agent – what do you think of when I say this word?

Do you think of someone in real estate? Someone who represents us when we buy or sell a house?

Or living in the Valley, a good percentage in this room probably jumped to Artificial Intelligence, thinking of an AI agent that makes choices and does tasks... we could go on and on about AI agents but we're not going to talk about that kind of agent today

Or possibly Mission Impossible? A spy? Someone sent out on behalf of their govt to achieve a particular mission, usually undercover and in secret...

Well, we will be talking about agents on “mission” today, and I submit to you that we are all called to be God’s agents on mission. Maybe a core question for you is “What mission am I on?” As believers, we are part of an epic mission that began with Jesus’ ministry on earth over 2000 years ago. Sometimes it’s easy to lose sight of this mission as we live out the daily grind here and get caught up in conversations about AI taking over the world. But honestly the text today is going to bring us back to Jesus’ desire that the Kingdom of God take over the world. The amazing truth is that this doesn’t happen with a lightning flash from heaven, but in fact Jesus enlists all of us to invite one and all to be part of his kingdom. We get to participate as his agents in the greatest of missions.

But I know that most of us don’t feel trained, equipped, and honestly are just scared to be agents. We don’t look like, act like or feel like a whole school change agent or a Tom Cruise or Jason Bourne. We would rather leave it to the professionals (like Nolan).

The passage we are looking at today will help us redefine and reframe and maybe remember that being part of God's being mission is a privilege and a gift. We will also think about the unexpected joy that comes from knowing God and being part of His plan.

We have been working our way through the gospel of Luke which is the longest gospel in terms of number of verses. Luke, the good Gentile doctor, is concerned with God's plan for Israel as well as the entire world and how Jesus fulfills this plan. It is a gospel written to declare the good news for everyone. We just ended the Ministry of Jesus in Galilee 2 weeks ago, and we are now just beginning the longest section in Luke of Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem. Journey is a very important theme for Luke. Jesus is on a journey to Jerusalem with his followers and will teach them many things along the way. He will also live with them and love them and listen to them and heal them. Luke continues this journey motif in Acts when these very followers take all that they have learned and spread the good news throughout the known world. And it's exciting to think that we also are an ongoing part of this journey today to the New Jerusalem as Scott taught us last week.

In our passage this morning, Jesus is sending his followers out two by two...to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal...to take nothing with them...wait, didn't we already read this? Yes! Back in chapter 9, Jesus sent out the 12. Now he is sending out the 72! The ministry has grown – the workers have multiplied by 6 even after the high bar of commitment Jesus set at the end of chapter 9 last week. So parts of this passage may sound familiar but in chapter 10

Jesus sends out his followers before him with instructions and warnings. After receiving his instructions, they will see the absolute importance of the mission, and finally after the mission, they will see the heartfelt response of his agents and of Jesus Himself.

1. Righting our Expectations of the Mission (Luke 10:1-12)

¹After 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. ²And 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. ³Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But 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.' ¹²I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

There's a lot here but I just want to draw your attention to the Who, the How, and the What. Who is going out? How should they go? And what should they expect?

We see that those who are being sent out have been appointed by the Lord Jesus. I find it encouraging that this passage comes right after last week's text on the high commitment of discipleship. It shows that these 72 have heard what the Lord requires to be a disciple and have said yes to him. And Jesus is using them! The number 72 could be symbolic, pointing back to the Table of Nations in Gen 10 where there are 72 nations of the world listed. A group of 72 followers of Jesus going out brings to mind a mission that will eventually reach the entire earth. Luke will continue to write about this ongoing mission in the Book of Acts. The kingdom movement is beginning to grow, and if these 72 represent the nations, if the 72 are committed followers of Christ, then we can see ourselves in the 72. The 72 means us. We who have decided to follow Jesus and commit to Him are now all appointed to be sent out with his message of love and life. Jesus is not calling an elite group of highly trained specialists; no, he just wants us, just as we are. And we are together in this – all part of the same team with the same goal and purpose. We are all representatives and agents of Jesus.

How should they go? Jesus instructs them to go with a partner; let their testimony be made more credible by two. This is not ever a solo mission; we have a partner; we are part of the 72; we are a part of the Body of believers going back to these very times. You can see in verse 2 they are to go out prayerfully, asking the Lord of the harvest to go before them and thrust out more laborers. They are to go out fully dependent on the Lord to resource them, verse 4 says to not bring along extra sandals or backpacks or money. They are to go out with purpose and intention, not stopping to dilly-dally or “greet” anyone on the way.

Finally, what should they expect? Jesus gathers this group of followers and previews what they might run into. He doesn't send them out blind and unprepared. Instead of painting a rosy picture of their mission, he gives them a good dose of reality.

The first expectation: The need is great. In verse 2 Jesus tells them the harvest is plentiful which means that there are many who are ripe and ready to respond to the invitation to the kingdom, and there are only few workers. But Jesus is reminding them that there is a Lord of the harvest. He is in charge of the mission. He is responsible for sending out workers. So how do we respond

to a need that is greater than us? We Pray. We pray that as we are sent out and share the love of Christ that the Lord of the harvest would bring in the fruit. We pray that the Lord of the harvest would provide the necessary workers during this limited time of ripeness. We pray that our time and efforts would be multiplied.

Secondly, Jesus tells us to expect opposition in verse 3. Not only will the need be greater than we can ourselves handle, but he sends us out like lambs in the midst of wolves. We are vulnerable to opposition and predators. There are forces that are opposed to the invitation of the Kingdom, and they are against us. The Lord doesn't want us to go out naively and unaware. We should expect resistance and challenge and opposition.

Finally, though we bear an invitation of grace and love, Jesus prepares us for the sad reality that not everyone will respond favorably to the message. There are towns that will receive them and towns that will not. Jesus instructs the 72 on how they should handle those who receive them.

They bless the home with peace; they heal the sick and offer the benefits of wholeness and reconciliation with God, and they proclaim with words the arrival of the kingdom of God to them. This acceptance of the message changes everything going forward. For those who are

resistant and do not receive Jesus' sent out ones, Jesus says to not force the issue. They are to leave but they are to leave with a warning – the kingdom of heaven has arrived – and they should consider the consequences of their decision.

Nolan and I were both part of Campus Crusade for Christ in college, and it's remarkable that he is still a part of the organization today! Cate also was part of Cru on her campus! It was there that I learned the importance of sharing our faith. Like the 72, we were often paired up and sent out to have spiritual conversations with random people on campus. Like the 72, we were warned that there would be opposition and apathy and indifference and rudeness. We prayed regularly to the Lord of the harvest; we sincerely tried to obey God in fulfilling the great commission. And I am thankful for those years of learning how to share my testimony and how to relate the gospel in four easy steps. But looking at this text, Jesus seems to be talking about a lot more. He doesn't give a formula of what to say or a list of arguments that will be sure to win people over. Eating what is set before you seems to me to be an opportunity for Shared life around the table, sharing of hurts and broken dreams and offering the comfort and healing only Jesus can give. Pronouncing a blessing of peace to communities.

*I have learned that being sent out involves so much more than those 2 hour windows when I would ask strangers if they would like to know God personally. Being sent out involves getting to know people and trusting that the Lord will provide for their needs and ours. Being sent out is yielding to the Lord of the Harvest – for the gathering in of his children, for protection from opposition, for the outcome. As we consider being sent out along the journey of our lives, **let's together pray to the Lord of the Harvest** to send out laborers into His Harvest to send us out. And as we pray may our posture be open to Him and how He may be asking us to show up and bring peace wherever we go.*

So we have seen that Jesus appoints and sends all of us out – to many different towns and villages ahead of Him. He provides the necessary instructions about the lay of the land before they go out on this mission.

But how important is this mission? It is the most consequential message that we are asked to relay. The Invitation and the RSVP affect everyone, everywhere, in every time and every place. *And I am grateful that Cru did teach me this well. There is no greater mission than to share this message of Jesus' life and love with others.*

2. Responding to the Most Consequential Question of One's Life

Luke 10:13-15

¹³ *“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.*

Here, Jesus is using an Old Testament prophet speech-form. The prophets often used “woe oracles” to pronounce judgment or to lament the hard-heartedness of Israel and other nations, but I think it’s helpful to keep in mind that though the “woes” sound like unyielding judgment – the purpose is to shock the listeners into considering their guilt before it’s too late. It’s actually a call to repentance. To turn back to God, and the good news is that the Lord never turns away from someone who is turning to Him. He will always relent in the face of sincere repentance.

This comparison is also meant to grab the attention of his hearers. Sodom, Tyre and Sidon are all cities that were described as terribly wicked to the point that just the word Sodom represented wickedness to the Jewish people. And Tyre and Sidon were judged by the prophets for pride and arrogance before God.

Meanwhile the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum were all villages around the Sea of Galilee where Jesus spent a lot of time. He would have taught there and performed miracles there. Capernaum was his “base” of operations. But Jesus says compared to the worst reputable cities in Jewish history, they fare much worse because they had access to Jesus - His words, His signs and miracles, and they still rejected him.

It is not yet time for judgment...that day will come but it’s not yet. This is why the invitation today is so urgent and so consequential.

Jesus is calling us to participate in letting people know about His love and salvation before it’s too late. *This summer I attended two memorial services. One was for a non-believer and the other was for a believer. The contrast between those two services couldn't have been more stark. One was marked by a cold rain and the other was filled with the love and joy and hope of*

Jesus reflected in his relationships and life's purpose. Memorials are really good for reorienting us to what really matters. Recentering us on the only question whose answer will make a difference for all eternity. If you've been dancing around Jesus and His invitation, postponing a true and sincere consideration of who He is, I invite you to take this sermon as a sign that Jesus is calling you to Him. He loves you and has come to bring us an abundant life starting the moment you say yes to Him.

3. Representing – Being Agents

Back in the text, Jesus turns back to the 72 and says:

¹⁶ *“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” (Luke 10:16)*

Jesus is the ultimate sent out one. The Father has sent Jesus as the exact imprint of His nature as it says in Hebrew 1. Verse 16 is a very important verse about the Jewish concept of being an agent.

You may think I keep using the word “agent” to keep with the theme of mission but there is a deeper thought here. You see, the word “agent” comes from the root word “to send” so an agent is a “sent out one.” But beyond just being a representative, even an authorized representative...being an agent means being so in tune with the person you’re representing that when someone speaks to you it’s like talking to the source. For the disciples who were interacting with Jesus on earth, they could see that in any given situation Jesus was responding, speaking and acting as God the Father would.

In a similar but more limited way, the 72 and all followers of Christ are also agents of Jesus. An agent is not an expert; an agent is someone who knows the one they are representing. And as we grow in knowing Christ we become truer agents. Verse 16 states that when the world hears you, it hears Jesus. And the one who rejects you is rejecting Jesus. And because Jesus is the perfect agent, the sent one of God, those who reject Jesus are also rejecting God the Father. There is no diminishment of authority as it passes down the chain from God the Father through Jesus to us.

Can we be agents of the Lord Jesus today? Implicit in all of this is that we know him. We spend time with Him. We learn His patterns of thought, His manner of actions, His ways of speaking. And as we get to know him, we can in turn be his hands and feet and mouth in whatever field the Lord has placed us – whether that’s at your tech company on Monday morning, in a zoom call, walking with your neighbor, greeting your checkout lady at the store. These 72 had been walking with him, learning from him, living with him. Now Jesus appoints them and sends them out as people he trusts to speak on his behalf, heal on his behalf, love on his behalf. Can we be agents of the Lord today? Be sent out ahead of him, not alone, but with a partner, with a team and share his love and good news with others? **Let’s continue deepening our own relationship with Jesus so that we can reflect Him to others, the most important person they will ever know.**

OK, the Lord of the Harvest has sent us out with instructions and righted our expectations, sent us out with the most important invitation, and sent us out as agents to say and do the things he would.

What was the result of this mission? I would expect burnout and insecurities and exhaustion, but this is what Luke says:

4. Rejoicing in Knowing God and Being Known

Luke 10:17-24

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.”

²¹ In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them

to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²²All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

²³Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! ²⁴For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

The 72 return with joy! Do you see the repetition of the word joy and rejoice in these verses? The kingdom of heaven has arrived and with it the reign of Satan is crumbling with the final defeat to come at the moment of the cross. This is the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise way back in Genesis 3:15 when God declares that Eve's offspring will bruise the serpent's head. We see the 72 treading and stomping on the serpents and scorpions. So much to celebrate – the tide of darkness is being turned back – and they have been able to be a part of that.

But Jesus gently points out that their joy, our joy, actually stems from the fact that we can know Jesus, that our names are written in heaven – we are in eternal relationship with Him. More than any victory, our joy comes from the security of being loved and belonging to the King.

Jesus Himself then exults – he rejoices in the Holy Spirit and in the pleasure of the Father. His gratitude comes from God's wisdom and gracious will that so many of His children can come to know Him. Those who seek a Father and are humble enough to see and hear His voice. Those who acknowledge their need and recognize the provision that Jesus provides.

Truly the greatest blessing in all of history, in all of time, is to see and know and experience Jesus. The disciples stood at a hinge point and were blessed. Blessed to be with Jesus at this moment and to see the Kingdom come.

Why is this so surprising to me? An unexpected ending? I guess with the expectations Jesus set about being outnumbered and vulnerable and not always well-received, that obedience to Jesus' mission would just be hard and challenging. A hard but necessary pill to swallow. That the 72 might just come back relieved to be done. I didn't expect joy to be the result of this mission. Did you? This passage has reminded me that being a part of God's kingdom, a part of His body with all of you, and obeying His voice to go out in the world is ultimately for our good and for God's pleasure. And what is for our good will bring us joy! The end of the story is joy - great rejoicing - for me, for all of us, for Jesus and the Holy Spirit and God the Father.

I had the opportunity and privilege to share my love for Jesus this past week with someone I am already in a relationship with but hadn't intentionally had a chance to talk with her about spiritual things. And I may not have had the perfect strategy or gameplan, but I was trying to communicate how a relationship with the God of the universe begins with wanting to get to know Him. It's not a checklist of rules but He is a real person who would love nothing more than to be known by her. And I experienced so much joy – not in her response – but because I was able to share my own experience and feeling about Someone I Love So Much. The joy of mission, of sharing our faith, comes from being reminded of our own belovedness, that our names are written in heaven.

You know – we are called to be His agents in this world, and we are called to the greatest, most important mission. To share the love of Christ with our lives. To reflect Him in our daily lives, both spontaneously and intentionally. When we recount how much the Lord has done for us, how much He loves us – it brings us so much joy to remember His love for us. To know God is a blessing that causes us to rejoice, causes Jesus Himself to rejoice! **Let's experience the joy – as we share with others!**

And that is why these baptisms today are some of the most joyful moments we can experience – because the simple acceptance of an invitation to an eternal relationship is the most important thing about us. It moves us in our core because that is what life is all about.

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So although being sent out can feel too intimidating, too challenging, a responsibility that's honestly over our heads, let's remember the result is not up to us. We have the honor and the privilege of being sent out with the most important invitation to any who will hear and receive it. The surprising result is joy – to be part of God's generous will and plan and to remember His own love for us.

Because God is the Lord of the Harvest, we can share the gospel with joy. So let's all Pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers, even us, to bring His harvest in. Let's continue to know him better to be His agents to our neighbors, friends, and family, knowing this is the most important invitation we will ever be giving out.

Let's then experience His amazing joy as we testify of His love for us.