

We are the 70

(Luke 10:1-11, 16-20)

Sermon delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, July 7, 2019

In the name of the one God: creator; redeemer; and sustainer. Amen.

This morning's Gospel reading lays out for us the second commissioning we have in the span of two chapters of Luke. In the first few verses of chapter nine, Jesus sent the Twelve out, empowering them to "proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal."¹ Today, we have him appointing 70 others to pair off and go out ahead of him ... a type of advance team into the areas "where he himself intended to go"² during his journey to Jerusalem.

Now there are a few points about this passage that stood out to me and which I would like to highlight before I go any further:

- First, as with many other readings we encounter in the Scriptures, there is no clear indication here of just how many people were gathered with Jesus when he made this appointment. All we know is that there are at least 70.
- Second, because we do not know the size of the crowd that was with him, we do not know for certain how Jesus went about selecting those who would be part of the group that was commissioned. We have heard the lengthy list of instructions that was given to them ... instructions about offering peace for those who welcomed them into their homes and shaking the dust off their feet in the towns of those who rejected them. Jesus even tells them to eat what is provided and cure the sick. We just do not know the "them" to whom he is speaking.
- Finally, something else that is missing from the narrative ... one of those wonderful "gap moments" that I love so much ... is an indication of the inner dialogue taking place with those in the crowd. Were some standing nearby and thinking to themselves, "Please don't send me; I have enough to do already"? Were there others who may have been interested in taking part but uncertain about how difficult the work would be? Were there still others in the group who without hesitation leaped up and shouted "Pick me! Pick me!?" And might there have been a few who were worried they would be picked last ... or not chosen at all?

I did some reflecting on these points and have a few observations to offer based on nothing more than what the Holy Spirit has stirred up within me.

- I feel that the 70 who were sent represented **everyone there**. I have no doubt that both men **and** women were sent. And I believe that **everyone** was sent because **everyone** is called by God to action. **Everyone** has something to offer on behalf of Jesus ... a gift to

¹ Luke 9:2 (NRSV).

² Luke 10:1 (NRSV).

share ... wisdom or experience to impart. **Everyone** has been blessed with something that makes them unique, and because of that I cannot see any reason why Jesus would not have sent the entire crowd ... a crowd of 70 ... to go before him. And with this, the first two points have been addressed: there were 70, and all were commissioned because Jesus refuses to let anyone squander their gifts and abilities.

- Because I believe **everyone** was sent, I also believe that at the end of the day the doubts or questions some ... or even many ... may have had were all zeroed out and replaced simply with an awareness of their call and the **importance** of that call. If one person was feeling nervous, they were paired with a second who was about to go through the exact same experience with them. Someone perhaps thinking there was too much to do? That was no longer valid, because likely the person with them had just as much to do ... or perhaps even more. In the end it did not matter; they would be strengthened by God and by one another ... and what “to do” list can **really** measure up to what our creator asks us to do?

In the ordination liturgy found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, one of the options for the Old Testament reading is from the sixth chapter of Isaiah. The most powerful verse is the last one in the reading, verse eight: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, “Here I am; send me!”³ This morning, with the commissioning in Luke and this particular verse from Isaiah in mind (which would work quite well as part of today’s readings), I would like to say this: **all of us** have been called, and **all of us** can be sent.

This day, and every day, **we are the 70**.

So where are we being sent? We have each been commissioned by Jesus; where do we feel called to act? It is important to remember that “the mission of the seventy ... in the Gospel, although in a distant time and place, is very much the mission of the church in the twenty-first century. The messengers have changed from age to age, but the message is the same. All followers of Jesus ... are called to give voice to and embody the kingdom of God.”⁴ In a nutshell, that is where we are being called and sent: to be the embodiment of God’s kingdom here on earth.

Each of you will discern best what that means for you ... where it means you should be acting and active in the community. During this summer season, a slower time of reflection and (here at the church) planning for the coming year, I invite you to take some time to engage in a bit of discernment. Think of where you might feel yourself being summoned. As we consider ways that we can expand our work here and grow our community, what would you like to see? What do you think people might be looking to experience as they come here? What about our church might motivate you to invite others to join us for worship ... or an outreach encounter ... or simply to dip their toes in our deep faith tradition?

³ Isaiah 6:8 (NRSV).

⁴ Mitties McDonald DeChamplain, “Luke 10:1-16: Homiletical Perspective.” *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, Vol. 1*.

Oh, and before I forget, there is one other very small but very important verse in this passage. In verse 17 we hear these words: “The seventy returned with joy.”⁵ Regardless of what they were feeling when Jesus sent them out, they came back to him with ***joy***. Not only is that the source of who we are and the gifts with which we have been endowed – God’s joy – it is a reward for ***all*** that we are called to do.

The 70 went into the world not knowing what they would encounter or what they would accomplish. They returned knowing they had done some incredible things in God’s name. They went out as laborers to the harvest, and they came back with one of the greatest crops imaginable.

They came back with ***joy***.

May we each accept the commission we have been given; may we each go to where we feel we are being called. And may we do it knowing that we have the support and love of God and in anticipation of the joy we will share and the joy we will receive.

Amen.

⁵ Luke 10:17 (NRSV).