

“Christ’s Sending and Its Importance”

Luke 10:1-20

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost 2019

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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In chapter 10 of Luke’s Gospel, the Holy Spirit tells us about a day when Jesus appointed 72 others of His disciples. He sent these 72 by an express command to heal the sick, to speak peace in Jesus’s Name, to preach the kingdom of God. He gave them instructions. Take no moneybag, no knapsack full of clothes. I send you as lambs in the midst of wolves. He sent these 72 as workers in His harvest.

He does not send the 72 in the strength and power of their own resources, because their message and their ministry is given to them by the one who sends. They do not go in the authority of their own persons. They go only in an authority given, a delegation for a certain purpose.

This imagery of lambs in the midst of wolves is powerful (Luke 10:3). If you have chickens, or cow-calves, or maybe even sheep, you could think that Jesus has this backwards. You protect your chickens or cow-calves or lambs from wolves. You do not send them into the midst of wolves.

But Jesus sends the 72 out as lambs in the midst of wolves. God’s Gospel goes forth into a world that is not predisposed to accept it. This reminds me of soldiers or first responders who do not run away from the danger but into it to save others. This is the only way the word of God can go forth and change hearts. But the word of the Gospel of peace has the power of the word that brought all things into existence out of nothing.

Since Jesus sends the 72 out as lambs, He teaches that those He sends are not sent with clever arguments that defang the wolves. He does not send His representatives with power that neutralizes the wolves. He sends them only with the Gospel of peace, with His Word and the wisdom His word speaks. The sons of peace receive it. The wolves do not. But this Gospel of peace is powerful. It creates the faith which in turn receives it. The wolves, which have no need for such a Gospel and reject it, miss the kingdom of God.

These 72 are followers of Jesus. This becomes clear at the end of the text where Jesus tells them to rejoice that their names have been written in heaven.

These 72 have been appointed by Jesus and specifically sent by Him, charged with a specific task. They are to be His representatives. In verse 16 Jesus says to the 72: “The one who hears you, hears me. The one who rejects you, rejects me. The one who rejects me, rejects him who sent me.”

Luke’s Gospel is the only one that has this account of the sending of the 72, and it refers to the 72 as *others*. Why others? It is because in chapter 9 of Luke’s Gospel Jesus called out the twelve apostles and sent them. Now, in chapter 10, Jesus appoints 72 others and sends them.

Why did Jesus appoint and send these 72 others, after having sent the 12 apostles? A good explanation is that Jesus was looking ahead to the time in the church age when the 12 apostles would no longer be alive. The 12 apostles had a very special task and place in God’s kingdom. They established the Gospel for all time, and it is preserved for us in the New Testament. But what happens when they are gone? Does Jesus make provision for a specifically appointed ministry in His name for the church to look to, for Him to operate through? He does. Jesus calls, selects, and appoints 72 others to teach us that the office of the ministry will go on even after the

12 apostles.

So Jesus selects 72 and appoints and commands, go and speak. Speak peace. If a son of peace hears your words, your peace will rest upon him or her. If that person is not a son or daughter of peace, then your peace will return to you. Heal the sick and tell them that the kingdom of God has come near.

With respect to those who reject the ministry of the 72, the ministry of the Gospel of peace in Jesus, he instructs the 72 to wipe off the dust that had accumulated on their feet in that town and say, but know this, "In my speaking peace to you in Jesus's Name and by His command, the kingdom of God has come near to you."

Why does Jesus do this? A couple things.

Jesus operates with a certain general assumption. It is that if we are to find peace with God, if we are to know God's mind about us and His will, then it must be spoken to us. Knowing these things does not arise from within us. We are unable to climb up to God through moral effort or intellectual investigation to find out these things from God. Finding God in His omnipotence or in the simple fact of His existence does not tell us if God intends peace toward us or destruction. God in His majesty is hidden.

Our culture is making the mistake of thinking that truth about God and knowing God's will and mind arises from within us, either individually or collectively as a society, and that we can bring the kingdom of God by our own doing and by making laws and defending rights. And so it tries to grasp God by moral achievement or intellectual investigation. In so doing it attempts to grasp God only in the Law and in His majesty.

Jesus and the Gospel, however, operate with an entirely different assumption. The Gospel and the Kingdom of God come from the outside in through Jesus's authorized speaking of the Gospel of peace. So Jesus sends His emissaries, to represent Him, to reveal the will and mind of God at Jesus's command. Speak peace, for God intends peace. The power of God's peace is found only in reception of Jesus's Gospel of peace.

Another reason is an extension of this. What do you do when your own heart fails you and God is nowhere to be found and apparently silent and your sins and your circumstances condemn you and bring you nothing but fear? In such times, it does not do you any good to try to climb up to God, to find Him in your own efforts. In these times it is your own efforts that are being shown not to work.

If only God could speak to me peace and promise that He is there and cares and forgives. You need to hear God speak to your ears, from the outside in to comfort your hearts, and in spite of the circumstances, to be assured of God's peace and love toward you.

So Jesus puts the Gospel of peace in the mouth of representatives, to speak the Gospel of peace to you. God loves you. Your sins are forgiven in Jesus. God is there. Though it does not seem like it in our experience, He has overcome all things for you in Jesus. And your heart finds rest in the Gospel of peace spoken to you.

There is a specific application of this that is a great blessing. At the beginning of the service, you confessed your sins. Then you heard me say these words, as pastor, not as Charles Westby: "By virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word, I forgive you all your sins." If we were to use the version of absolution provided in Setting Three of the Divine Service in the Lutheran Service Book, you would hear me say as pastor, not as Charles Westby, "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins."

This is Jesus speaking through His representative. This representative has no authority to speak these words in his own person, but solely on the basis of the calling and sending of Christ

to speak them.

And so you, looking for assurance of peace from God in light of your sins, hear these words as the words of Christ. And you give thanks that Christ has so ordained it that, when we are talking about whether He is peacefully disposed toward you, you do not need to try and go and find assurance in your own heart, or in your own piety and works, or trying to find the omnipotent God who in His omnipotence is nowhere to be found. No intellectual search for God or argument for God's existence can ever tell you whether God is peacefully disposed toward you and forgives your sins.

This is not a power trip for the 72, for the minister. Do not rejoice Jesus says to them, that the spirits are subject to you, but that your names have been written in heaven. Jesus ordains this as a blessing to you to find the assurance and sure promise of peace from God. He who hears you hears me, Jesus says to the 72, and concerning the ministry of the Gospel through the office today. And He who receives me, says Jesus, receives God the Father, who sent me.

So we thank Jesus today for appointing and sending the 72, for the office of ministering the Gospel of peace that He sustains for us today in our midst. By this office He speaks peace and assures you that you have peace with God the Father Himself.

Amen.