

Text: Luke 10:1-20

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. ¹³“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. 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.”

Theme: Amazed at the Power of the God

Did you ever pray that God would strengthen your faith? I have found that this prayer is one that we need to be careful about praying. It is never answered with a sudden big blessing that plops down from heaven. God doesn't immediately give us a large amount of money, lots of friends or things that we really want. He answers that prayer with a time of testing. He brings us to places and people that we didn't want to go. He puts us through some difficult times. He brings us to the verge of doubting whether He really exists. But in the end we are left amazed at His power and the authority of the Gospel. Those works of God leave us assured of His power and love for those who belong to Him.

I. God often sends His people on impossible missions.

That was the case of the 72 that Jesus sent out. In the verses just before our text, we see just how unqualified the 12 apostles were. They didn't understand what Jesus meant when He spoke about His upcoming betrayal. They fought among themselves about which one of them was the greatest. They wanted to send fire on a village that rejected the Gospel. Now Jesus was sending out 72 even less trained followers to prepare the way for His arrival. He told them, “*I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.*” That's not much of a pep talk. It was like telling them that their mission had little chance of success. There would be a lot of fierce opposition to them. The opposition was much stronger than they were. But he made it even harder on them. They were not to take any money, any luggage or even an extra pair of sandals. When they came into a village, they were to simply go to a home, say, “*Peace to this house,*” and if a man of peace was there, that family would provide all that they needed.

Can you imagine what it must have been like for those 72 followers of Jesus? I don't think that they left with great joy. They probably left with a lot of fear. They wondered how this was ever going to turn out. Where would they stay? How would they eat? Their message was, "*The kingdom of God is near you.*" Would the people really repent and believe the message? Would they really be able to heal the sick? What Jesus sent them out to do seemed impossible.

I wonder how often Paul thought that same thing during his missionary travels. He often made many plans of where he wanted to go, but seldom did things work out according to his plans. When he was in Asia Minor, he wanted to travel east, but God stopped him from going in that direction and led him to a place he had never been, which was Europe. He desired to preach the Gospel in Rome, and he did so under house arrest. There were times when he was beaten, arrested, and even stoned during his ministry. He was even shipwrecked. In today's epistle lesson, he writes that he bore the marks of Christ on his body. There were many scars he had for the sake of Christ. How could one man bring the Gospel to so many people?

God also sends things in our lives that seem impossible to deal with. There are temptations that every one of us struggle with. Why does God allow those temptations to come into our lives? They become a great burden. Far too often we fail and succumb to them. Our struggle with temptation leaves us weak and frustrated. There are problems that we struggle with. Tragedies come into our lives. Friends forsake us. Times of great despair and worry sap our strength. We get to the point that we don't know what to do any more. As His people God often sends us to people and places where we don't want to go, and on missions that we feel completely unprepared for. Like almost all of the prophets, we want to say, "Lord, please find someone else. I can't do this. There has to be someone more qualified than me." Jesus told the 72, I am sending you like sheep among wolves. Sometimes we feel like He has done the same thing to us. He sends us, His sheep, to places that are not safe for us to be.

II. His power in those circumstances leaves us amazed.

The 72 returned with great joy at the conclusion of their mission. They said, "*Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.*" They must have been amazed, that people took them in. They gave them all that they needed to eat. People believed their message. But what most intrigued them was that the demons had to submit to them. They were able to heal and cast out demons just like Jesus did. They had been sent out like lambs among wolves, but they had one great advantage. They Good Shepherd was with them. He gave them the authority to overcome all the power of the devil. He made sure that nothing would harm them. This experience strengthened their trust in the authority of God's Word and His power for all who believe in Him. This mission strengthened their faith in Jesus.

Paul's struggles also strengthened his faith. As he traveled from place to place he must have been amazed at how God worked in ways that he never planned. In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul writes about how he struggled with false apostles. Later in that chapter he writes about his struggles – his beatings and the dangers he experienced. He was lowered in a basket from a city wall to escape arrest in Damascus. In 2 Corinthians 12 he writes how he struggled with his thorn in the flesh. Yet, in all of these experiences he came to see the power of God and the authority of His Word. God blessed his ministry despite the false apostles, He delivered him from many evils, and despite his weaknesses, God worked mightily through him. As Paul writes in today's epistle lesson, all these things made

him boast in nothing but the cross of Christ. (Gal 6:14) He was sent out like a lamb among wolves. He was weak, but the power and the strength of Christ shown through.

Christ's work leaves us amazed also. Why does God allow temptation to come into our lives, especially the ones that we really struggle with? In the end, God even blesses us with those experiences. Imagine if you never struggled with temptation. It would become an even greater temptation to look down on those who do struggle with temptation. When they fall, you would be tempted to look down on them. But our own struggle with temptation gives us patience and sympathy with others who struggle. The forgiveness we receive when we fall, gives us joy in the Lord that we are forgiven rather than pride that we are so much better than others. We go through experiences and times in life that show us just how weak we are. Yet, in His own way and time, God delivers us in a way that we never could. Those times give us joy in the Lord for the help that He gave to us. God sends us to people and places we didn't want to go. He gives us the words to say. We tell them about Christ and the sacrifice He made for us. To our amazement those words give comfort, peace, and even faith in Christ. The Lord sends us out like lambs among wolves. It seems like the tasks He gives to us are impossible, but He told the disciples after His resurrection, "*Lo, I am with you always.*" He is with us with His forgiveness and power.

III. Our greatest joy, however, is in a gift that is eternal.

Jesus told the 72, "*Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*" God gives us joy in so many things on this earth. We have the joy of our forgiveness, the joy of His deliverance from every evil, the joy of so many blessings, the joy of seeing the power of God's Word in the lives of people. But the greatest joy of all is knowing that through Christ our names are written in heaven. The day will come to each of us with the greatest fear of all. Death will come. It is a struggle that only comes once, and it appears that we will lose. It will seem like the wolf will snatch the sheep from the shepherd's arms. But Jesus promises that nothing can snatch us from His arms. He will call our names. He will bring our souls to His rest. On the last day, He will raise our bodies to everlasting life with Him. We will no longer need faith because we will see Him in all the glory of heaven. That is where our true joy is to be found.

God doesn't usually work the way that we want Him to. He brings us through many dangers, toils, and snares. He sends us out like lambs among wolves, but His grace is always with us. He works with power and the authority of His Word build His church and deliver His people. He strengthens our faith today. He brings us to boast in the cross of Christ and the love that God has shown to us. Most of all, He brings us to look forward to the eternal joys that we will have with Him in the glory of heaven. May God give us faith that guides us in this life and brings us to the joy of eternal life with our Lord in heaven.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
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