

Sermon

Oct. 15, 2017

Based on Luke 10:1-11

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This morning we are beginning a three week sermon series in which hospitality is the focus. Now by hospitality I mean more than having a clean room, comfortable temperature, with coffee, tea and cookies. Hospitality is an event where there is a mutual exchange. In the hospitality industry, say, a hotel, you will receive a clean room, cozy bed and a complimentary breakfast in exchange for money. In Christian hospitality there is a mutual exchange of gifts. It is not transactional but rather a relationship in which everyone involved both gives and receives freely.

Today we will consider how hospitality is central to what we have been sent by God to live out. Specifically, you and I have been commissioned by God to evangelize, to share the gospel, to bear witness to how we have experienced Christ in our life. We are a sent people on mission to demonstrate what the kingdom of God looks like. We are the body of Christ, continuing Christ's ministry throughout the world. We are part of a missionary movement. And how we go about our missional and evangelical work is to participate in Christian hospitality.

I suggest that Jesus' sending of the seventy that we heard about this morning provides a guideline for the sending that we have received. It is a model. We aren't going to do our missional and evangelical work exactly the same way as these seventy apostles did back then. We live in a different time and context. We have different life circumstances. There is a lot of different ways to live out our call to bear witness to the gospel. But there are some principles here that can guide us as we work out how to go about this call we have to be witnesses of the gospel.

First off, Jesus describes the need for laborers because the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. The harvest is those who have yet to participate in the kingdom of God. They do not yet know that God loves them and has a purpose for their life. The laborers are those who are sent out to gather these people in. In other words, the laborers are the seventy

apostles, as well as you and me. We are the laborers. This means that we aren't supposed to wait for people to come to us. We have to go out to where the people are. We have to go to those who are not yet a part of the body of Christ and gather them in.

Now the harvest is definitely plentiful. The number of people who do not identify with any religion has been on the increase for decades. Churches have been emptying out. Society is increasingly non-religious. So many people are not connected in any significant way with a Christian community. They are all around us. And I believe that if even every United Methodist in Ohio did the labor that we are called to do that it would completely transform the state. And there are a lot more Christians than United Methodists. There is a lot to be done and I am the first to admit that building relationships with those who are not yet part of a church is not something I always find time for. So, please hear me. I am far from where I want to be when it comes to reaching out to others. So this message is for me as much as it is for you.

Jesus sent out the seventy, and us, in a position of vulnerability. He said he was sending them out like sheep among wolves. And there are wolves out there. When we go out to build relationships with people who have yet to experience the love of God in a meaningful way, sometimes we come across people who are hardened, manipulative, and just plain mean. It's risky sometimes, hanging around people who are not Christians.

But Jesus amps up the vulnerability for the apostles by instructing them not to bring with them a purse, bag, or sandals. In other words, they have to depend on the good will of others to sustain their daily living. They are not to be self-sufficient, only giving and not receiving. Maybe this was no big deal for these apostles because they already didn't have any of those things. Perhaps they were poor. So Jesus was telling them that they didn't need to be well off to do this work. In fact, that they didn't need anything but the name of Jesus and each other. If they were wealthy, then this would have been more challenging for them to take on. It's hard for us to leave behind our resources. Some of us, when we are going on a trip, do travel light. Others of us pack a lot more than we will need for just in case. If we were those apostles back then,

the orders would have been to travel light. Somehow our needs would get met as we go along.

This is kind of liberating. I've been pastoring for a long time. And I have never served a church where the leadership struggled with what to do with all the resources they had and all the money they had in the bank. Actually it is the opposite. Every church I have served have felt like they didn't have enough of whatever they felt they needed to do what God was calling them to do. The radical message from Jesus that you don't need anything! If we have Jesus and each other, then we have all we need to go out, build relationships, and demonstrate the kingdom of God. It does not take money! But it does take time.

And it requires taking risks. That's why the apostles were sent out in twos, for mutual support, encouragement, and backup. This missionary work we are on is a team ministry. We do it in partnership with each other. Think about those Jehovah's Witnesses or those young Mormon men with their black pants and white shirts riding their bikes. They all travel in pairs. It just is good common sense to do things with others rather than flying solo. So as we go about our work to reach out to others, we ought to do it as teams.

Verses 6-9 is the heart of the work that those apostles and us are called to do. It describes the substance of hospitality. As the apostles went to some stranger's home, they didn't knock on the door and when the person answered, asked them to come to their church or invited them to come to some program. They didn't ask anything. No, the first thing they did was offer peace. When the door was opened, they gave the gift of peace. If the peace they offered was received, then they came on in to the house. They were to eat and drink whatever was set before them. If they were vegetarians and steak was on the menu they ate steak that night. They received their hosts as they are. They, the guests, received whatever their hosts offered them, food, drink, and stories. They listened to their struggles, their complaints, their hurts. And then they responded by giving what they could to meet those needs. That's what Jesus meant when he told them to cure the sick. He meant that the apostles were to meet the needs of those whom they were hanging out with. And they were to speak a word of hope, that the kingdom of God had drawn near

to them. This was how the ideal experience of Christian hospitality was supposed to unfold. We see here the mutual exchange of giving and receiving. The apostles offer peace and receive peace. They receive the food and drink of their hosts. They offer help, responding to the needs of their hosts, giving their hosts a word of hope. These four verses describe Christian hospitality, which is central to our mission to go to those who are not yet Christians.

Now whether the apostles were welcomed into people's homes or were rejected, the message was the same, that the kingdom of God was near. What is the kingdom of God? There are a lot of kingdoms in this world. These are kingdoms that ask for our allegiance and in return we are promised happiness, purpose, and fulfillment. There is the kingdom of advertising. There is the kingdom of wealth. There is the kingdom of sports. There is the kingdom of partisan politics. The kingdom of advertising is designed to keep us chasing satisfaction. The kingdom of wealth can let us down when the stock market crashes. The kingdom of sports promises victory but often leads to disappointment (can I get a witness from Cleveland Browns fans?) The kingdom of partisan politics gets our hopes up prior to the election but gridlock remains and we become increasingly disillusioned with our politics. The only kingdom that can truly satisfy us, the one in which the promises will be kept, the one that gives us purpose, fulfillment and happiness is the kingdom of God. And that is the kingdom that we advocate for, the kingdom we embody, the kingdom we live by and serve. This is the kingdom we demonstrate to others who are not yet a part of this kingdom, with the hopes that they will join us.

Finally, Jesus sends them out with the expectation that they will be successful. It would be cynical and cruel if Jesus sent those apostles out with the expectation they would fail. He knew that they would succeed. But Jesus was also realistic. He knew that they would face obstacles. There would be resistance. There would even be rejection. In those cases, Jesus told them what to do. They were to shake the dust off their feet and keep moving. They were not to throw in the towel if things didn't work out according to their expectations. They were to stick with it, be determined, keep being faithful to what they had been sent to do.

Hopeful, realistic, and determined. That's the attitude that Jesus had and it was the attitude he impressed on those apostles to have. That is the attitude that we need to have as we carry on with the work that is laid before each of us.

I challenge all of us to go forth as laborers in the harvest with hopeful expectation that we will bear fruit. As we engage with those who are not yet Christians, build relationships centered around the mutual exchange of gifts that is Christian hospitality, we will see lives transformed, including our own. But we also have to be realistic. There are always setbacks and rejection. But we must be determined to press on with the work that God has called all of us to do, a work that lasts for the rest of our days, the work of evangelistic hospitality.