

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
“Going Wherever With Nothing to Give Everything to Everyone”

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There is an old line that goes: we say as much by what we don't say as by what we do say. I don't know if that's true or not, though I will say, in my experience, it seems truer than not. If it is true, then this is the sermon that will try to say something by talking about everything that Jesus didn't say in our passage today.

First, a little context, a little lead-in. In many Bibles, as in my own, Luke chapter 10 is subtitled, “The Mission of the Seventy,” and it begins with the words, “After this the Lord appointed seventy others.” Sounds important, doesn't it? The Lord is appointing people. But what are they being appointed for? Is it to fill an important seat in government, to become Secretary of State? Is it to take command of the army, or to lead a charge into battle? Is it to move up to the head-table at some great party the Lord is throwing? The guest list is being put together and you've been picked to sit at the front, next to the Lord, where everyone will be able to see you. If you were going to be appointed by a lord, in this case the Lord *Jesus*, what would you want to be appointed for? Or would you hope to not be appointed at all?

In writing about the 70, notice that Luke doesn't tell us who they are. We know only that the last people to get an assignment from Jesus turned their assignment in before finishing it. If Luke chapter 10 begins with the subtitle, “The Mission of the Seventy,” Luke chapter 9 ends with the subtitle, “Would Be Followers of Jesus.” Would-be-followers—these are the people who start out telling Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go,” but who then come up with a million other things they must go and do first. “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” “Lord, first let me say goodbye to my family back home.” I don't think Jesus means to say that burying the dead or kissing our mother goodbye isn't a good and noble thing to do, but he tells them, “Let the dead bury their own dead,” and, “No one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” It would seem the Lord Jesus has some kind of urgency about him this morning that cannot wait, something that for the moment trumps even funerals and family. Except he's not telling us exactly what it is. He hints at it back in verse 48. He has just cast out a demon from a young boy and everyone is standing

around going ooh and aah and singing God's praises when the next thing you know they're singing their own praises, and arguing over who is the greatest among them. And Jesus hits them with: "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest." Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me. "But this child was demon-possessed, full of the devil, and Jesus, we know who you are," the would-be-followers say. "You're the great healer! You mean to tell us, though, that to welcome the demonized is to welcome you? That in the kingdom of God, the one who heals and the one who needs to be healed are one-in-the-same?"

I'm reminded of the story Henri Nouwen tells about a mentally handicapped adult named Trevor who lived in the group home where Nouwen also lived and worked as a catholic chaplain. On this particular day, Nouwen is at the local hospital where he is set to speak to a large group of doctors and medical staff over lunch and the topic of spiritual living. But he is also there to visit with Trevor, who has recently been admitted to the psych unit to receive some extra care. Upon arriving at the hospital, Nouwen is met by the Chief Medical Officer who ushers him into a large room where lunch is to take place. The tables are all set with fine white linen and shining silverware. Soon, the rest of the doctors start to arrive and take their seats. "Where is Trevor?" Nouwen asks, turning to the Chief Medical Officer.

"Oh, he won't be coming here. You can visit with him after lunch."

"I don't understand," Nouwen says. "I came to see Trevor. We can't begin without him."

"Well I'm sorry, but patients are not allowed in this room. And besides, doctors don't eat lunch with patients."

"Well I'm sorry," Nouwen replied, "but this isn't a room I can be in either then."

You mean to tell us that in the kingdom of God, to welcome the demonized, the put-upon, and outcast is to welcome Jesus? Luke says the would-be-followers couldn't fathom a world without such distinctions and categories, and so they turned and walked away.

Then there is what happens in verse 52. Jesus is on his way from Philippi to Jerusalem. It's a bit of a haul and he knows he will need to stop and rest for a night on the way. So he sends another group of followers on ahead to make reservations in a Samaritan village. Now the Samaritans are Jews just like Jesus. They believe in God, they believe in showing kindness to their neighbors (remember the story of the Good Samaritan?). Only when it comes to worship, they don't go to Jerusalem; they go someplace else. Their religious traditions and faith have a different look to them. Therefore, when Jesus gets to the Samaritan village, James and John ask Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to rain down from heaven upon them?"

"What, you think you're so much better just because you're a Jerusalem Jew and not a Samaritan Jew? You think God's on your side and that power and judgement are in your hands because you're you and not someone else?"

There is a beauty to this place, and I can't tell you just how grateful I am to have you as my people. But let us not be fooled. If we believe God is the God of all the earth, then let us believe God hears the prayers of all the earth—theirs as much as ours—the Hindu and the Muslim, the Native American and the Immigrant American, the Jew and the Christian, the person who prays to God in a thousand ways and using a thousand names and the person who isn't even sure God is out there listening. God is hearing them all this morning, from Four Corners Community Chapel to the four corners of the earth.

In her book, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*, Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest who now teaches world religion classes to freshman at Piedmont College in Georgia, writes that, "By the end of the first century, the religion *of* Jesus had become the religion *about* him, so that even he might have been alarmed by what his followers had done"¹ Even he would have been forced to ask, when did the faith of my ancestors become so mean?

"Lord, do you want us to command fire to rain down from heaven upon them?"

¹ Taylor, Barbara Brown (2019). *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*, New York: Harper Collins Publishing, p. 81.

“No,” I imagine Jesus saying with a stern but tearful eye.

You have to wonder, don't you, if the 70 knew what they were getting into when Jesus appointed them to go out in pairs to every town and place he intended to go? Did they know about the hundreds who had come before them who had also been appointed, but who had long since turned back? Did they know that despite the high dropout rate, Jesus was sticking to his message, still eyeing that cross? Did they know he was going to send them out like lambs in the midst of wolves, and give them no weapons to carry? Did they know he wasn't going to give them a map, or show them where the enemy lived, so they could be sure to avoid the bad parts of town? Did they know he wasn't even going to distinguish for them between friend and enemy? Did they know his back-up plan was also his only plan? Go from town to town, speak peace to whoever is living there—“Shalom!” if more appropriate, or “Salam,” or “Shaanti,” or just be silent in reverence and awe. And stay there. Don't go in and out so quickly, but stay for a while. Sit down at table together, and take the bread that is offered to you, and not the bread that you wish you could have. Break it, pass it, taste it, and see that God is always bigger than imagined. And finally, did they know that in this world of trouble and care, where Jesus says “Do not worry about what you don't have,” what Jesus means is, no one can take love away from you, and if you have love then you have everything. I wonder, did they know? Do you?