

Sermon for July 24, 2022 – Luke 10:1-12,16-20

When I began studying for the ministry back in 1976, there was concern about a coming shortage of pastors. During the next 12 years of school, I prayed about this and discussed it with my classmates. What I didn't pray for was that the Lord would give me a call when I finished with seminary. With all the talk of a pastor shortage, I just assumed there would be a congregation for me to serve somewhere.

Fast forward to 1988. A few weeks before call day at the seminary, I was summoned to a meeting with, not two or three of my classmates, but about a dozen. We were told that we would not be assigned to a church on call day. I couldn't believe it! What about the pastor shortage I heard so much about? I was so wrapped up in self-pity I didn't realize that the Lord had answered the prayers of his people and the feared shortage was not severe.

The pastor shortage cycle has come around again. The number of graduates from the Seminary and Martin Luther College is not even close to what our synod needs and can use. Once again Jesus urges us, "Pray for workers." Christ will commission them and give them authority.

There will always be a shortage of workers for the Lord's church because less than a third of the world's population are Christian. That leaves billions that need to be reached with the gospel. The need was great in Jesus' day too. **The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.** Jesus was heading to Jerusalem for the final time. As he traveled with a group of followers through Samaria, he pointed out a large mission field. He sent 72 of them ahead with the message that the God's kingdom was near. Jesus the Messiah was coming to their town.

Jesus made them aware of the shortage of laborers. The "harvest" refers to the uncountable number of those God chose, before he created the world, to believe in Jesus. We call them the elect. He directed them to the source for workers. "Ask," he said, literally "beg" in the Greek, the Lord to send out more. Christ commissions them as he did the 72, giving them a divine call.

Those he commissions and sends he cares for. **I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.** They were to travel light and trust him. They were lambs among wolves. Enemies of Jesus would hate and hinder them but their needs would be provided. There was urgency to their task. They were not to chat on the roadside with other travelers they met. No time. The work was urgent because Jesus was heading to Jerusalem to die for the world.

Jesus gave people the privilege to participate in the ministry by showing hospitality to the 72. **When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.** They were to humbly accept the hospitality; not moving from house to house looking for better accommodations. They were to serve without expecting anything in return. They showed their appreciation by extending peace to the houses they entered, the peace with God. In the message of the kingdom they spoke was peace with God for Christ would make satisfaction for their sins.

Pray for workers. Isn't that the easiest and most powerful thing we can do, putting it in the hands of the Lord of the church? How often do we? Let's unselfishly think of not only St John's but of your brothers & sisters across WI. Pray for churches in Jackson, Appleton, Wausau, Manitowoc to get pastors too. It's easy to dismiss our lack of prayer with, "God knows what we need." Jesus told us to ask. Our prayers show we realize our help must come from the Lord. He's the supplier. Only he can move hearts to enter the ministry.

Shame on us for failing to ask daily. Shame on us for putting the ministry in a bad light in the eyes of our youth with disparaging remarks about a called worker's gifts, salary. Shame on us for not bringing the youth to hear the preaching & teaching of the word. Shame on us for praying selfishly: "Lord give us more workers but not one of my kids or grandkids." We need to repent for hindering the Lord's harvest.

What a relief & joy that we can always pray for forgiveness too and know that he's faithful to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness because of Jesus. He was the lamb of God among the wolves both physical and spiritual. He was devoured by death to deliver us from death and hell's clutches forever. **Romans 4 - He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life because of our justification.**

The Lord has forgiven us for how we've hindered his harvest. He compels us to work with him in the kingdom. Pray for workers. Talk to your kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews, about the need God has put before us. Send offerings for tuition assistance so that is not an obstacle for any future pastor or teacher.

Go to the source and pray for workers. He commissions and cares for them and sends them out with authority in message and miracles. **Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, '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.** "The kingdom is near" was more than just stating a fact but was used by the Spirit to make faith. The kingdom is Christ ruling in people's hearts. The message was, "he wants to come into your hearts." It was a call to repent. He's near right now. It was a capsule of the law and gospel.

The 72 found out that the welcome mat was not out in every town. In those places that rejected the gospel, they wiped the dust off as they left as a sign of God's judgment on them.

The miracles also gave them authority. They authenticated that Jesus had sent them with a credible message. **The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.** As they proclaimed that the messiah was near, demons just had to flee. Jesus saw the ultimate judgment of Satan and his final fall in defeat at Golgotha. Jesus' reference to snakes did not mean they were immune from venom but a picture of how Satan and his demons would be trampled on by the miraculous power with which he sent them. Yet he reminded them, **Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**

Jesus tempered their enthusiasm reminding them of the greatest thing to rejoice about. Their names were written in the heavenly hotel register. The greatest joy for those messengers was that Christ saved them as well.

The kingdom of God is near because Christ became what he was not, human, died like we will, and rose to show our rescue from hell was signed, sealed, delivered. It's near because Christ lives in us and made us what we were not, holy children of God. It's near because he's near in word & communion. **Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

Our names are also written in the book of life because of that message; more are yet to be. It needs to be heard and we're short of mouths right now. Pray for more. That call day at Sem 33 years ago was difficult, watching my friends be assigned. But the Lord had me wait only a couple months before he called me to serve and that was the best time. He will send your next pastor here at the right time also. In the meantime, let's diligently pray for more workers to gather the soul harvest.