

Pentecost 4 / July 7, 2019

Luke 10:2

“Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.”

Do you remember the person who first shared the gospel of God’s love in Christ with you? Maybe it was your mother or father, who prayed with you and read you bible stories before you went to sleep at night. Maybe it was your grandmother, who always said thanks to God when you sat down to eat the dinner she had prepared. Whether we remember the first time we heard the word or not, the seed of faith was planted in our hearts through the hearing of the word. Through the course of time and by continual reseeded through the word, the Holy Spirit gave it life and growth. Even when we were too young to understand, even before we were born, the Holy Spirit was working through the word to give us faith. In Psalm 22 David sang, “...You are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at mother’s breasts. On you was I cast from birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God.”

The gospel is shared and is spread in many ways in the modern world; through television and radio broadcasts, such as those produced by Lutheran Hour Ministries. The most simple gospel statement is John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life.” You see those words on bill boards, rail cars and bridges. People display signs with the verse at sporting events, so viewers watching on television may see, be preserved in their faith, or come to believe. There is power in the word no matter how it is expressed, because wherever the word is proclaimed the Holy Spirit is also present to create and sustain faith in the human heart. The Lord said to Isaiah, “The word that goes forth from my mouth will not return to me empty, but will achieve what I desire and accomplish the purpose for which I sent it.”

There are many ways to share the gospel, even as there are many ways to sow seed. Nevertheless, the best way to receive the gospel is from the lips of another human being. This is how God shares His Word with us. In the prologue to his gospel, John writes of Jesus’ divine nature and incarnation saying, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Jesus is the eternal creative Word, through whom all things came to be and in whom all things hold together. When God speaks His Word it is done. Nothing can resist the absolute power of God’s Word. John continues saying of Jesus, “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” God clothes His word with flesh to better speak with us and share the gospel of His love. Jesus shared in our flesh and blood in order that He might share the word of the gospel with us.

There is power in the word, but the word is expressed most powerfully when it is clothed with flesh, shared and spoken by another human being. Jesus became human to better share the gospel of salvation with us. He calls us as humans to share the gospel with others in any way possible, but especially with our voices, our hands and our hearts. In our gospel Jesus sends 72 followers out to speak in His name that others might believe. So in our lives Jesus gives parents, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders and many others to share with us the word of life; the gospel of salvation through His dying and rising. He calls us to rejoice that for the sake of His blood and righteousness our names are written in heaven. Even as we have received the word through the voice of others, He calls us to lift up our voices and share with others the good news of His love; to tell them that the kingdom of God has come near, so that they too may believe in Him as Saviour and rejoice in His salvation.

After Jesus was baptized He was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, where He fasted 40 days and was tested by the devil. At the end of those 40 days He went out and preached the gospel saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." He went to the people, healed their sick, raised their dead and most importantly, He proclaimed the season of God's favour and called People to believe in the forgiveness of sins. People responded to the gospel call; many believed, followed and travelled with Him from place to place. The 72 sent out by Jesus in our gospel are among that number. People came in the thousands to see Him, hear His words and perhaps receive the healing of His touch. Matthew says that "When he saw the crowds he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." He called them to Himself and said, "Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Jesus loves people and has compassion on us, because He sees the chains that bind us and the sin mars our lives. He came to seek and to save the lost. But, Jesus was just one man and although He is the Son of God from eternity, during His earthly ministry He limited Himself to the capacity of a human being. Jesus couldn't do it all Himself. He called the twelve and sent them to teach and preach salvation in His Name. He called and appointed 72 others and sent them to prepare every town and village He intended to visit, for His coming and to say, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

He gave them His authority over the devil and his minions. Being human that was probably what fascinated them the most. When they returned, the first thing they said was "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" Jesus shared in their joy, but gently reminded them that what was most important was that their names were written in heaven. From Jesus' perspective the devil was already defeated. He said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." It was a done deal! What was most important was the disciples' salvation and the salvation they were called and empowered to share, as they told others the good news of the kingdom of God. For God's kingdom begins in the human heart as men, women and children believe in Jesus' Holy Name and the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling with us.

Through the 72, through us and through all who believe, Jesus expresses the power of His love in the forgiveness of sins. In forgiveness, He releases people from the chains of sin and the power of the devil. In the forgiveness of sins, He lifts the curse of guilt and the condemnation of eternal death from the heads and hearts of those who believe. Jesus may, or He may not, give us His authority to cast out evil spirits and heal the sick, but He has given us a greater authority. He gives the authority to proclaim pardon, healing and peace with God through the word of the gospel and faith in His name. He gives us His authority to raise the spiritually dead to faith, by speaking the gospel. He gives us authority and power to impart the Holy Spirit, through the sharing of the gospel. Whenever someone shared the word of the gospel with you, they were also imparting the Holy Spirit; because whenever the word is spoken the Holy Spirit is also present to create, nurture and sustain faith in Jesus' Holy Name. We rejoice that our names are written in heaven in the blood of Christ the Lamb. We rejoice that we are privileged to share the gospel and proclaim the Name of Jesus to others.

Jesus called the twelve and sent them to share the good news. Then He called 72 others and sent them to share the good news. Including Jesus that was 85 people and it still wasn't enough. The harvest is so plentiful that the labourers were still too few. And so Jesus said, "Therefore pray earnestly for the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest." The Lord began to answer that prayer on the Day of Pentecost when the promised Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers gathered in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost there were around 120 believers

gathered in prayer, not counting other believers who remained in the towns and villages were the 72 had gone and preached faith in His name. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the assembled believers, 120 labourers proclaimed the wonders of God in Christ in the languages of all the pilgrims who were gathered from every nation under heaven. Immediately the Lord began a great harvest of eternal life, as through their words, another three thousand came to faith and were baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus calls us to share the gospel. Think of the many people who have shared the gospel with you during the course of your life. Think of the ways in which they shared Jesus, through their words and by clothing their words with loving hearts and kind actions. Consider how you might imitate them. Jesus sent 72 out to proclaim His Name in every town and village He intended to visit. Jesus didn't send everyone out to do this, he sent 72 of his disciples for this task. Perhaps you are not the type of person who would feel comfortable doing this. Luke was a physician, but in this gospel he is describing, not prescribing. He isn't saying that every believer must do as these 72 did. We are not all able nor called to share Jesus in this way, but we are all called to share Jesus. Think of how you might share Jesus in word and action with the gifts God has given you. Tell bible stories to your children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Model forgiveness! Be kind! Be patient! Watch, wait and pray for the opportunity to tell about Jesus' love.

If people are not interested, leave them be, commend them into the care of the Holy Spirit, pray for them and prepare for an appropriate time. Don't be discouraged. In last week's gospel Jesus was booted out of a Samaritan village. They didn't want to listen to a Jew on His way to Jerusalem. In the next chapter Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Don't harbour anger. James and John were so angry at the Samaritans that wiping the dust off their feet in witness against them was not enough. They wanted to call fire from heaven to destroy them. Jesus wasn't angry. He told them 'no' and said, "The Son of Man came not to destroy people's lives, but to save them." Remember God sent Jesus not to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. We are witnessing to His love in Christ Jesus.

The gospel never fails to bear fruit, because whenever and wherever it is shared, by word and action, the Holy Spirit is also present to create and sustain faith in the hearts of those who hear. Pray for the opportunity to share the Name of Jesus with others. In due time there will be a crop to be harvested for the Lord. One sows, another waters and another harvests. We may not be the one to gather the harvest, but we can all sow the seed. Be patient, a door closed now may be opened in the future to you or to someone else to tell the good of Jesus and salvation through forgiveness and faith in His Name. The Lord gives growth. Remember the Holy Spirit is with you. Rejoice that you are called to share Jesus with others. Rejoice that for the sake of Jesus, His blood and righteousness, your name is written in heaven. In Jesus' Name. Amen