

In Dependence©

Luke 10:1-11; 16-20

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In today's passage, Jesus sends out 70 followers to the places where he plans to go do ministry. They go as a preparation, in a way, like John the Baptist. They are preparing the way for Jesus. Jesus sends them two by two and they are not to take any of their comforts with them – not even their sandals! They are vulnerable; they will be received graciously by some and not so graciously by others. They are to be completely dependent on the hosts where they stay. They eat whatever is provided; sleep in whatever accommodations they are given.

In a time when we think so often about being independent, individualistic, not needing help from others, Jesus demonstrates the need for community, for a team to do his work. No one person (not even a trained pastor) is able to do all the work.

As I was growing up on a small ranch in Oklahoma, my stepdad raised Black Angus cattle. The only crops he harvested were alfalfa, fescue and soybeans. Every summer, dad would have a number of hay hands out in the field, helping with the harvest. My brother, David, was always out there and often some of the teenage boys from our surrounding community would be hired.

While our neighbor utilized his daughters, as well as his sons, to work in the fields, my dad wasn't too keen on me being out there, driving a tractor or throwing bales. He was a strong believer that girls should not be doing the work of the men and boys (even though I was envious of my neighbor, Janice, who was my best friend.) I admit, I probably would not have been as crazy about doing it if I HAD to do it every day – getting up at the crack of dawn, working in the heat of the day without many breaks. But, I did enjoy the few times I was asked to drive the hay truck (usually because someone didn't show up).

Maybe part of why I enjoyed driving the truck was because the neighborhood boys were kind of like brothers. They teased me unmercifully at times. Sometimes they stayed at our house for several weeks, bunking in with my brothers or sleeping in the tent. Our families would get together quite often.

One 4th of July, these pseudo brothers joined my real brother in getting me cornered down in the storm cellar where they threw firecrackers at me, laughing while I was screaming. So, my opportunity for paying them back was when they were standing on the back of the hay truck, riding to the next group of hay bales, and I would (quite innocently) suddenly make an abrupt stop, throwing them off the truck. (I wasn't going very fast.)

Putting up hay was a huge, itchy, hot and sweaty job that really needed a team of people to get it done right. It would be nearly impossible for one person to do the entire job.

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus talks about the harvest (the harvest being the many people who haven't heard the good news of the kingdom of God being near). Jesus, while planning to

go later, doesn't just do it himself, nor does he send one person alone to accomplish the mission. Jesus sends out teams to bring in the harvest.

Here are a few lessons from this passage in Luke that I think are important, even for us today:

1. Instead of independence, Jesus teaches the importance of dependence on each other. The old saying, it *takes a village* is still pretty relevant today, especially when it comes to ministry. Together, we can accomplish so much more than if we were trying to do it all alone.
2. The harvest is abundant but it isn't up to us to prepare the harvest; it is up to us to gather the harvest. God is the Lord of the harvest. God prepares it and grows it according to God's will and sends us to gather it – together.
3. We are vulnerable in this mission where much of the world will be hostile, but Jesus does not arm us for battle. Instead, Jesus sends us out like lambs. We bring peace to each person. Whether they receive it or not is out of our control. If they do receive it, peace will multiply. If they do not, we are not to take revenge.
4. We stay the course; we remain where the Spirit leads us. By our becoming vulnerable, depending on others, people are not apt to think that we are arrogant or “know it all's.” Instead, we are kind and friendly and selfless.
5. We may not realize the significance of what we have done. But Jesus has blessed us and sent us, and there are impressions made and blessings given that may not take hold until sometime later ... a time we may never see.
6. Finally, whatever good and successful things we have accomplished; or whatever failure we feel has happened, the greatest thing for us to rejoice in is that our names are written in heaven. We have been given grace and love and peace, not by what we have done, or accomplished, but by what God has done through Jesus.

As you are all well aware, tomorrow is the 4th of July. Independence Day. The day we, in the United States, celebrate our freedom from being ruled by Great Britain. We rejoice in our independence.

Did you know that the only clergyman whose signature is on the Declaration of Independence was John Knox Witherspoon? He was a teacher at what is now known as Princeton University and was a Presbyterian minister.

David Lose writes, in his commentary on today's scripture: “In the United States, we sometimes see this day as a tribute, not just to our independence from Great Britain, but also to the spirit of American individualism. “Yet,” he writes, “the individualism we celebrate is as much a myth of the culture as is our invulnerability. The pilgrims and pioneers who settled this land were incredibly aware that their survival depended on each other. The colonies they eventually established, after all, we called “commonwealths,” places where the good of any individual was inextricably linked to the good of the whole. And as Benjamin Franklin said at the

signing of the Declaration of Independence, “We must hang together, or assuredly we will all hang separately.”

The point is, we are not as independent as we might think we are. Instead, we are in dependence on one another to be able to accomplish the things Jesus Christ wants for this particular church. We are an important part of his Body of Believers; followers whom he sends to do his work, even today. There is always a harvest, ready for those who are willing to be the harvesters – the hay hands.

I invite you to look on the back of your bulletins and see the names of the elders serving actively right now on Session. You see that each one is a team leader of one of the ministry teams here at Holly Presbyterian Church. The names of each team member are not listed there because of lack of space but they are just as important as the ones who are listed. Some of the teams have 3 people serving and some have five or more. Several of the teams have people who are serving on more than one team.

This morning, I would like to encourage you to look carefully at the names of each ministry team: Do you see Outreach? Care? Fellowship? Christian Education? Worship? IT (Information Technology)? Personnel? Property? Finance? If you are not serving on a team, would you please think carefully about what each of these teams do? Think about how important they are for the ministry of our particular congregation. If you aren't sure about what some of them do, ask me or one of the elders listed.

The thing is, Jesus still calls each of his followers to ministry. The Holy Spirit still today equips every believer with spiritual gifts. Do you think taking care of the property is a spiritual gift? Of course it is! Some of us can't hammer a nail in the wall; some of us do not have a knack for seeing problems that need repair. But many of us do. And it is the same with all the teams.

Can you imagine how little we would accomplish in ministry without our ministry teams? No one – not even a very energetic, charismatic pastor – can get everything done that is necessary for the mission of the church. On the other hand, can you imagine what it would look like if every person answered the call of God to serve on a team? This little congregation does a good bit of ministry. But we could do more; we could reach more; we could grow more – in our vision, in our ideas, in our passion for going out and reaching more people – those whom God sends us to.

We are not independent. We very much depend on one another. It's not as scary to be vulnerable; to get knocked down; to offer ourselves in love and peace when we have a buddy – another part of the team going with us.

Please know that what we do counts – whether we are small or big. And also, know that whatever you do, or don't do, your name is written in the book of life in heaven. Grace does not depend on our works or our accomplishments. But loving Christ can give us the courage to join in with the ministry he visions for this church, in this time. Let us rejoice that we are not totally independent, but that we are in dependence on one another as the family of God – as harvesters for him. Amen.

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