

**“Laborers in the Vineyard,” Sermon, July 3, 2022**  
**First Presbyterian Church, Marshfield, WI.**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. Rev. Dr. Janet E. Wolfe**

Texts: Isaiah 66:10-14, (Ps. 66:1-9), (Gal. 6:7-16), Luke 10:1-11. 16-20

In the Luke passage, Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem. He is thinking about the spread of the gospel after he is no longer with his followers, so he begins training them for the tasks ahead. Seventy, or seventy-two represents the mission to the whole world. Among his disciples are both men and women. There is no reason to think that all were included in the mission work. Our text from Isaiah 66 includes feminine imagery, portraying both God and Jerusalem as mother.

Luke might have been thinking of Moses’ appointment of the seventy elders in Numbers 11, or the reference to the seventy nations in Genesis 10. That is an account of the descendants of Noah. Luke is always concerned about the mission beyond Israel, as he shows in the Book of Acts, which is the story of the spread of the gospel throughout the known world, beginning with Pentecost.

Sending people out in pairs seems to be common among those who regularly send missionaries to knock on doors, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Latter Day Saints. I have occasionally knocked on doors for political campaigns and I much prefer to go with someone else, though that does not always happen. Whatever the subject of the visit, it seems to go more smoothly if there are more people in the conversation.

The symbolism of the harvest in v. 2 suggests that there is a great need for disciples of Jesus to spread the word and not a lot of time to do it. Scholars believe that Luke was written a few years after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70. This meant there was a sense that the end times were near. Jesus tells those who are being sent that they will not necessarily be safe on their journeys: “See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals and greet no one on the road.” He is advising them not to take much with them. Most of us, when we travel, take much more than we need. I used to pack a lot of things when I took a trip on an airplane; then the airlines started charging for checked bags, so I packed a whole lot less, only what I could carry and what would fit in the overhead bin. I didn’t miss much of anything.

Jesus encourages the disciples to accept what hospitality they are offered. When entering a home, he told them to say, “Peace to this house!” The word in Hebrew for peace is *shalom*, which suggests peace to the whole world. If the occupants accept his offering of peace, then the missionaries can stay with that family. Do not move around to different places, he says, but stay in one place, accepting whatever they offer. Eat the food that they provide. This might mean that the disciples are offered

food and drink that is not kosher, but they can still accept it. That is similar to the story in Acts 10 where Peter is told in a dream that he may eat all foods that he is offered as he ministers to both Jews and Gentiles. The family of Cornelius the centurion is baptized and received into the community of Jesus after Peter is convinced that he can welcome both Jews and Gentiles.

The reading from Galatians 6:7-16, which we did not hear today, also reminds us that God accepts both the circumcised and the uncircumcised, that all are welcome into the new creation brought about by Jesus and the coming kingdom.

Jesus instructs the disciples to “shake the dust off your feet” if you are not welcome in a home or a town. He knows that they will not be able to reach everyone, so there is no point in wasting time with those who are not receptive to the gospel. The Kingdom of God is near and it is unfortunate that some are not open to its message of justice and peace. Jesus says, “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

In spite of all Jesus’ warnings of danger, the seventy are quite pleased with the results that they get when they go out. In the name of Jesus, they are able to bring teaching and healing to many. “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us.” In response Jesus seems to be teasing them a bit when he says, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy and nothing will hurt you.” The disciples are surprised that they have the power to do the works that Jesus himself had been doing. Jesus offers them a blessing upon their return. He also offers them the Holy Spirit, which will give them the power for their mission to the whole world. Jesus’ vision does not make too much or too little of the success of the seventy but rather sets it into the larger frame of God’s reign.

What does all this mean to us? When we are baptized, we are called into God’s mission in the world. I don’t think it has ever been a problem in this church, but there are some congregations who expect the pastor to do all the work. That is not the way Presbyterians see ministry. It is the work of all the people. The pastor is called for the support of the people in the congregation as they do mission. In this church, we don’t do a lot of door knocking, but we have many ways of serving people through our mission. One of the things I especially like about this church is the way so many people step up and assume responsibility for all kinds of mission. Lately our church has been very active in the ecumenical committee for refugee resettlement. No family has yet arrived, but much has been donated so that the committee is ready when they do. We also don’t know where they will be from, so their needs may vary because of their former home and culture. Likewise, the church has been active in supporting immigrants who have come from many places, some undocumented. Our church makes an effort to welcome all kinds of people, recognizing that we are all children of God, created in God’s

image. Unfortunately, Marshfield isn't particularly diverse, but we seek out those who are from other ethnic groups and cultures. Though they may be few they contribute a lot to the church.

We have all sorts of ministries in which we participate. Our church has long been home to the Soup or Socks food pantry and clothes closet. We have also had food distribution for those who might not seek out SOS. We have offered special food distribution for Hispanic residents of our larger community. Though we do not have a lot of Hispanic people right in Marshfield, there are many in surrounding communities, working on dairy farms and in meatpacking facilities when they first come to the area. Our immigration task force has sponsored workshops in ways to work with immigration services. These have been offered in both English and Spanish, assisted by a number of people in our congregation who speak Spanish.

We have led the community in participation in the CROP Walk against Hunger, taking place again this year on September 25. Carmen Lawler and I will be beginning soon to organize for this year, and we would appreciate both financial sponsors and walkers from the congregation. Though it is housed at Wesley Methodist Church, we have long been a supporter of the Marshfield Area Respite Care Center for adults with dementia who still live at home. It provides a break for caregivers and safety for those who need care. This church was one of the founders of the Marshfield Area Habitat for Humanity, which has helped many people find adequate and affordable housing during the 25+ years that it has been working in the area.

Though I have outlined mission work that we do in hunger projects, providing adequate housing for those in need, refugee resettlement and welcoming immigrants, and respite care, there are many other ways of serving that members of the congregation do. I received a call this week from another pastor, new to the community. He had heard that we were known as the "social justice church" in Marshfield. I like it that we have that reputation. Never in the time I have been in Central Wisconsin has this church dropped the ball on this mission work, even when the church was facing other problems.

Though I think we do very well on that type of mission, I would like to see us combine spiritual growth along with seeking justice. I will be addressing that a bit more in two weeks when I will again be filling the pulpit.

Let us pray: God, lead us as we seek to spread the word about your coming Kingdom, as we seek to welcome all, and as we seek to be open to the movement of your Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.