

What is happening in today's Gospel reading? Jesus chose 70 of his followers and he sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. We talked last Sunday about being sent out as Jesus' messengers, to get things ready for him. This reading kind of builds on that, but gives us more information and instructions. And so let us take a look at what had happened and see how these events connect to our everyday lives.

The first thing that is kind of cool about this commission is that Jesus sends out 70 or in some texts 72 of his followers. Usually we imagine that it was Jesus and his 12 faithful disciples, but here we see that Jesus is starting to have much larger following, that the number is growing. And what is exciting is that it's not just a number of followers but it is an actual number of disciples, the ones who are mature in faith and willing enough to go and do the work and mission for Christ. At some point of their lives, they encountered Christ, then they walked with him, they listened to what he has to say, they prayed with him and experienced his power and glory and now they're anxious to get out and tell others about him. (pause)

Are you in that group of 70? Have you encountered Christ in your life? Have you felt his presence as you prayed to him or as you worshipped him? Have you seen him in your family, in your church community, on a mission trip, or a soup kitchen? Have you wandered about his words as you read the Bible? If you have then you are among those 70. You are Jesus' disciple to whom he says: "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.*"

You're probably thinking, well I can see myself as a potential disciple of Christ, but what is this whole harvest about. What am I supposed to harvest? (pause) Well what Jesus talks about here is the overall anticipation of the people in his time for the coming of the Messiah. People were ready to hear the good news of God's love. They were ready to experience the love of God, his compassion, and comfort, his healing and hope. They were like the wheat that is ready to be harvested. (pause)

We live in time when the harvest is still ready, especially in this area. Area that is still growing, where many people are new and are looking for a community, friends and support. Area where people might be asking themselves, is my house, my cars, my job... is this all? Or is there something more? Something better and bigger that goes perhaps beyond all the stuff. Something that might even go beyond my life? Do people ask these questions? I believe they

do, and if they do who is there to answer? Who is there to show them acceptance and love? Who is there to listen, to comfort and to invite?

It is us, Christ's disciples. The ones who has been walking with him for some time. And whether you are a mature Christian or just a beginner in faith God has a plan for you. God has someone ready to listen to what you have to say. And it's not always easy, as Jesus said, *the harvest is ready, but the laborers are few, and even those few are send out like lambs into the midst of wolves.*

If Jesus would live in Pacific Northwest he would say, I'm sending you like lambs into the midst of bears. ☺ But seriously, what do these words mean? Well they mean that despite the fact that the world is ready to hear the good news of Christ, there are still many who reject it, who mock it, who fight against it. Or there are those who don't really know what Christianity is about and never really thought about it. Either way, this is not to discourage us. We are sent out not to judge, but to share the good news in peace. Jesus says: *Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' And if people are willing to listen, then stay in that house, if they're sick, be there for them and pray for them. Talk to them about your relationship with Jesus and what it means for your everyday life. Invite them to Church, to your small group, to a fellowship activity. Share your excitement for Christ, show them how real he is and you'll see miracles happening in your life, in the life of your church and in the lives of people you touch.*

As I talked to the call committee during one of the interviews they shared with me that the goal of Shepherd of the Hills is to do mission and to reach out to community. We'll be singing after the sermon a Hymn of the day that says that we are one in mission. Today's Gospel reading revealed to us little bit more about this mission. And I can tell you that the best evangelism is a personal initiation. See Jesus could have built a church with a big sign, inviting people to come to worship, but instead he sent out his follower to go and talk to people, to get to know them, to eat with them and listen to what they have to say and then personally tell them about the kingdom of God.

Are we brave enough to do that? In the land of bears, are we willing to be those lambs who risk rejection in the name of Christ? I certainly hope so, for without this risk there won't be any harvest. But if we'll be willing to go, if we'll be willing to start ministries in this church to which we then can invite people, we'll enjoy plentiful harvest. I have no doubt about that.

The disciples that went out, came back overjoyed, they came back to Jesus energized, witnessing to him about all the miracles they experienced, they talked about the incredible power of God manifested through them and their work. That's what the work for Christ is about it, it's about joy, about peace, about healing and love, it's about a promise that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. May we enable more and more people to rejoice in this gift of God's grace.

Amen