

Sunday between 3rd and 9th July [14]

Luke 10:1-12 (13-16) 17-24

There's only so much you can learn sitting in a classroom. At some point, you're going to have to get some real-life experience! If you want to be a teacher, you need to practice working with real children. If you want to be a mechanic, you need to practice working on real cars. If you want to be a nurse, you need experience working with real sick people. Your education is not complete until you get out there and use what you've learned!

The same thing is true with the Christian life. In today's gospel reading, Jesus is teaching his disciples how to do the work of the ministry. He's saying, "Alright. You've watched me preach. You've seen me do healings. You've observed me driving out demons. You've watched me love people that have never been loved before. You've seen me do the things that a servant of God would normally do. Now it's time for YOU to do it. I didn't call you to follow me so that you could stand around and watch me do all the work. It's time for YOU to get some experience."

And in our reading, Jesus gives them their tools for ministry. First, he gives them a model for ministry. Jesus sends them ahead of him from village to village. Notice that Jesus doesn't wait around for the villagers to come to Him. He left Nazareth and went to them, and now he is sending others ahead to prepare the people for him. There is a lesson here, in Christian circles we talk a lot about getting people to come to our church but we don't talk enough about getting our church to go to the people. That's what Jesus is talking about here. He doesn't say, "Wait in the sanctuary, and pray for people to come in and fill the pews." He's saying, "I want the people in the pews to go to them." So much of the ministry that God calls us to do is outside the church. It happens when we reach out with God's word to the people in our own locality, when we teach our children right from wrong. When we reach out in Christian friendship to neighbours that God has placed in our lives. Reaching out with the love of God beyond the walls of this building should be our model for ministry.

The second thing that Jesus gives us is companionship for ministry. The disciples were sent in pairs and it was customary in both Jewish and Greek culture to send messengers in groups of two. That way, if something were to go wrong, there would be two witnesses to testify on behalf of the sender. But the bottom line is that God never intended us to do the work of ministry by ourselves, we need help and encouragement. Consider the apostle Paul, as great as he was, when the church sent him out on his first missionary journey in Acts 13, they didn't send him out there all alone. He went out with Barnabas and the name 'Barnabas' means Son of Encouragement. We all need people of encouragement in our lives, people who will love us, people who will build us up when life gets tough.

So far, we have seen that Jesus gives us a model for ministry and companionship for ministry. And he also gives us power for ministry. Jesus tells the disciples to heal the sick and preach the good news. Sometimes people say, "I can't serve the Lord! I can't even overcome the problems in my OWN life, let alone help anyone else. I can't do it!" They're probably right, we're not strong enough on our own but Jesus is not asking us to do this in our own strength. He's not asking us to minister in our own power. He's giving us his power for ministry. Also, Jesus gives his disciples the provisions for ministry. These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey - no bread, no bag, no money in your belts." He even said travel barefoot. This is the ultimate in 'travelling light' but there was a reason for this, to teach the disciples that if they're ever in a situation like this they will always be able to count on God to take care of them. Remember, this is just a short-term mission project. These disciples are just getting their feet wet. And Jesus wants them to know early on that

God's call will never lack God's supply. In fact, two years later, Jesus has the disciples look back on this experience. In Luke 22:35: Jesus said, "When I sent you without purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" And the disciples said, "Nothing." In other words, "there was never a time when we didn't have what we needed. God always took care of us." This is recorded in the Bible for us. God wants us to know that when we step out on faith to serve we will always have everything we need to live our lives.

Then, Jesus said, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town." In other words, "don't go running around looking for the nicest possible accommodation. Stay wherever you are welcomed." Jesus is telling his disciples here, "Don't leave these people with the impression that your ministry is all about you rather than all about God. Don't lead them to believe that you're in this only for yourself."

There's nothing wrong with experiencing the finer things in life. But when this becomes the main reason why you live your life and why you serve the Lord, then there's a problem. And then, Jesus says "if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." It was the custom of any Jewish person who had travelled outside of Palestine to carefully shake off all of the dust of the Gentile territories where they had passed through. By this action, they disassociated themselves from the sin of those countries and their impending judgment. So, Jesus is saying that if anyone doesn't welcome you, then you should treat them the same way they treat the Gentiles. Do this as a reminder to everyone in that town that you have fulfilled your ministry obligations, and that they will have to answer to God.

We all know people that we would love to see come to Christ. But for whatever reason, they are not open to spiritual things. Maybe they're just not ready. Keep them in your prayers. But if they get hostile, shake the dust off. Say, "Lord, I have fulfilled my responsibility to do what you wanted me to do. Now I hand this person over to you and ask that you take it from here."

So far, we've seen that Jesus gives us a model for ministry. Companionship for ministry. Power and provisions for ministry. And lastly, he gives us results for ministry. In the second part of the reading we hear the testimony of the disciples when they return and they are full of joy and faith because doing God's will, trusting Jesus and obeying his call has yielded amazing results. Jesus too, is triumphant but with a caveat, he tells the disciples not to revel in the power they feel from performing miracles in God's name, but in the relationship they now have with their heavenly father through their acts of faith.

So the message is that God calls us to minister to people, all sorts of people, new people we haven't met yet, people who are eager to engage with us and those who are not. God is concerned about their and our eternal destiny. Just as Jesus sent his disciples to help the hurting people of Galilee, He is sending us to help the hurting people of our community.

The point is that God never intended for us to be spectator Christians. We all need to be involved in some kind of ministry, whether it's Bible study, regular prayer ministry, visiting the sick, encouraging other believers, hospitality or something else, each one of us needs hands on practical experience otherwise, our Christian education isn't complete. Today we have been reminded that God is faithful, our needs are met when we trust God to provide for us and there are tangible results, even when we don't see them ourselves, when we follow God's call to do this work.