

Proper 9, Year C

- Have you ever wondered what God wants you to do?
- When I had finally decided, or maybe more accurately, finally admitted, that I might be interested in becoming a priest, one of the steps that I had to take was a process we call discernment
- Hopefully you've at least heard the term, but it's usually defined as a formal process of discerning call or vocation – asking questions about whether this is really what God wants me to do
- And I'm ashamed to admit that in the midst of that process was probably the first time I had done much in the way of thinking about what exactly God wanted me to do – I had thought vaguely about it, in the sense of, does God want me to be a good person – but I hadn't given much thought to the question of, "why did God make me the way that I am? How can I best make use of the gifts God has given me?"
- God is up to something this morning, as God so often is, and Luke is basically pleading with us to consider that fact in our reading from the tenth chapter of his Gospel – so if you haven't ever wondered that – haven't ever asked yourself, "what does God want me to do?", then has Luke ever got a word for you
- If you own a copy of the Bible, one of the things you'll note when you open it up is that it divides chapters up even further, and handily so, into thematic passages – even gives headings to these passages
- Heading for this section is "the mission (or *sending forth*) of the seventy"
- One of the things that's really interesting about that is that if you turn to the beginning of the chapter prior, Luke 9, it has a similar section, with a similar-sounding heading: "the mission of the 12"
- Those headings aren't part of Scripture, so I don't want to overemphasize them, but these passages are eerily alike
- So much so that I'm sure there must be some biblical commentator out there who has written that the first time around, Jesus just underestimated the amount of work that humanity would need – but that isn't right
- In ch. 9, Jesus sends out the 12, giving them similar instructions, and the 12 are generally thought of as representatives of the 12 tribes of Israel
- Twelve, it turns out, is one of the numbers of completion or perfection that you'll hear about in Scripture – and it's possible to make too much of this, as even just a glance at

some of the titles purporting to reveal the “secret meaning of the numbers in the Bible” will tell you – but this 12 is a pretty well-accepted, pretty obvious meaning

- And another commonly accepted number is the number we have here, again, in ch. 10 – 70
- 70 almost assuredly alludes to the seventy different nations of the world listed in the book of Genesis
- The initial sending was to the entirety of Israel, this one to the entirety of the world
- One of the themes you’ll hear of in Scripture is the ever-widening circle of God’s mercy – that God’s mercy begins with a small group of people and constantly expands, encompassing more and more people within God’s love
- And I think these two chapters of Luke tell us that that’s not only true of God’s mercy – but also true of God’s mission
- God’s mission begins very small – a few individuals asked to proclaim God’s word – and eventually, grows to the point that everyone is asked to take part
- Everyone is sent out in God’s name, asked to proclaim to the world, “the kingdom of God has come near to you.”
- Everyone is asked to take part in going out into the world, to preach, and teach, and heal, and pray for others to join in this labor – because the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few
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- In about a month, we’ll have the Bishop here with us to offer the rite of Confirmation, and I’m pleased that we’ll have a half dozen or so members of our church, members of the Body, who will be confirmed or received by the Bishop
- And while Confirmation is one of the rites in our church that you’ll hear a lot of different definitions of, one of my favorites is the idea of a transition from disciple to apostle – a transition from a disciple, someone who is a follower of Christ, a student at Christ’s feet – to an apostle, someone who is sent out, a messenger and evangelist in the name of God, to spread the Good News of God in Christ to the world that needs so badly to hear it
- But even before we have that rite performed with the Bishop, we have a group of youth who will be living that reality – who are being sent out into the world of rural Appalachia, to proclaim by word, maybe, but even more so by example, that the kingdom of God is near to the people who live there, too
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- It’s daunting to think about the fact that this might be what God is asking us to do – to go

out into the world and help to share the Good News, help to make people whole again through the love and forgiveness that comes from Christ – but I think it’s something that God has in mind for each and every one of us, in our own way

- And while Jesus doesn’t exactly make it sound easy when he calls us lambs in the midst of the wolves, and talks about us being among snakes and scorpions... Jesus does offer a few promises for us to take along with us
- First, we’re told that Jesus called the 70 “...and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go...”
- Jesus promises to show up – that even if we’re being sent somewhere that it seems like Jesus hasn’t been yet, we have the promise that Jesus will be there, right on our heels
- Second, in telling the 70 to take nothing with them, in describing them as sheep among wolves and telling them to rely on the hospitality of others, Jesus is certainly saying that this won’t be easy, yes – but also promising that God will provide – by telling us to travel light, Jesus is saying both that we don’t need to acquire status or possessions in order to have authority, that our authority comes from a source much higher than these
- And when Jesus tells us to rely on the hospitality and generosity of others, nerve wracking as such a command is, I can’t help but think of that passage from Matthew chapter 6: “Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”
- And finally, when this story takes a sudden turn, and Jesus gives an apocalyptic vision seemingly out of nowhere to the disciples, saying, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.” – there is in fact good reason for this: Jesus promises that we will be successful, that we will ultimately be victorious over evil, that this victory has already been seen and accomplished
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- So this passage is, thankfully, at least partly an answer to that question of what God wants you to do – because it’s something that God wants us all to do: be willing to be sent, and pray for others to join us. Don’t be enticed or tempted by possessions. Help to make the sick whole. Proclaim the peace of God to all we encounter, and let everyone know the kingdom of God is near.
- And always remember: Jesus will show up.
- God will provide.
- We will be victorious.