

## Bear One Another's Burdens

**6** My friends,<sup>[a]</sup> if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. <sup>2</sup>Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill<sup>[b]</sup> the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup>For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. <sup>4</sup>All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. <sup>5</sup>For all must carry their own loads.

<sup>6</sup>Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

<sup>7</sup>Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. <sup>8</sup>If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. <sup>9</sup>So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

## Luke 10:1-20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

10 After this the Lord appointed seventy<sup>[a]</sup> others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup> cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near.'<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>12</sup> I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

<sup>13</sup> "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>14</sup> But at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>15</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

<sup>16</sup> "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

<sup>17</sup> The seventy<sup>[d]</sup> returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" <sup>18</sup> He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

**July 3, 2016**

**Galatians 6:1-10, Luke 10:1-20**

**The Outcomes Belong to God**

**Kerra Becker English**

OK then. We are now up to the third of three evangelism sermons, and I'm glad you're still hanging in there with me. The first two Sundays, I admit, were a set up for this one. Today it's time to talk about the picture of evangelism that scares us the most – the one where we are sent to make disciples of all nations, to go two by two and door to door proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom. We Presbyterians have come to like our evangelism in the passive tense. Let them come to us – we've always said. No "pushing" our Jesus on anyone. No ultimatums from us that tell folks they must "Turn or Burn." In fact, rumor has it that at one national conference that the Presbyterian Church (USA) sponsored on Evangelism, a presenter asked the crowd, "What is the PCUSA's greatest gift for evangelism?" And a back-row participant yelled out, "Restraint."

And so, as you might have guessed – I'm not the most avid advocate for hard-sale evangelism. In fact, it has probably seemed like I have been skirting the topic these last two weeks. But I hope instead that the background information of the previous weeks proves itself vital to where it is that we are going. I think it's important if we are to share the good news of God's love and the blueprint for life that we find in Jesus Christ that we have a good sense of those foundations before we set out on any viable mission to the world. Remember, week one was, in a sentence: God loves ALL people, no exceptions. Those who are appointed to GO and TELL must know that they are not in any way superior in their thinking, in their doing, or in their being. They must always, always approach others with respect and kindness. And week

two was this: Follow Jesus, no excuses. Those who are sent to teach others about the way of Jesus probably ought to know something of what his life and ministry were about and also be able to interpret what his example means to your own life and ministry. These are not afterthoughts to evangelism. I believe they are its backbone.

Know God's love, follow Jesus' teaching – and GO! OK, deep breath. What does that mean? What does scripture tell us to do, and do these readings still apply today? In this passage from Luke, it's pretty specific what Jesus is asking, and other than telling the seventy to wear plain white shirts and dark pants or a skirt, and ring doorbells, to us, it looks a lot like the Mormon or Jehovah's Witness form of evangelism. Go in pairs. Travel light. Eat what's put in front of you. Be focused in your conversation. And know that God is watching to see who gets the message and who doesn't. Now, I don't know if any of you have ever done neighborhood canvassing or been responsible for marketing a church concept in a particular area, but this profile of a membership drive leaves me in a cold sweat. I hate it. I would almost rather do anything else. But then again, I hate with an equal passion the slick mass-mailings all too popular in my suburban neighborhood. Sending a mailing out in Brandermill must be really easy to do because we get so many. The church brochures aren't that different from those advertising summer camps, golf courses, or pool memberships. The message always seems to be, Look what fun you can have at our place!

But my hunch is that the impetus behind this plan in Luke for sending out the seventy was then something quite different from how we think of it now. I stole a quote from the internet that I think sums it up quite nicely. "Modern religion focuses on filling churches with people; the true gospel emphasizes filling people with God." (Not found with a complete attribution) We've come to think of evangelism as something synonymous with church growth. If evangelism

efforts are successful, there will ultimately be more butts in pews and more dollars in the offering plate. Again, like last week, the outcomes of Jesus' plan are a bit sketchy. He tells the seventy, if you aren't being heard where you are telling the story, shake the dust off your shoes and move on. Success, whatever that word means in this endeavor, really isn't our job. Our job is telling about God's love, and bearing witness to the life of Jesus. You win some, you lose some. Some will join churches, and some won't ever be attracted to organized religion. And the only guarantee that we get as evangelists is that you will likely face some form of rejection for what you are doing.

Our typical ways of marketing and evangelizing and promoting church growth run contrary to this. We get excited when people join the church, and with good reason. It is a wonderful thing to welcome folks into our church family. However, in thinking more like Jesus, I want you to be excited to share the love of God without expectation, in fact, reminded that rejection is just as likely of an outcome as hearing someone say, "Tell me more."

Now as for the two by two and door to door thing – I'm not so sure. I'm not sure the historical context for that or why it made sense for them to be teachers who traveled light enough that they were at the mercy of strangers for food and a bed for the night. In our world, living homelessly is terrifying. What I do want you to take and receive from this message is that you are being sent out as ministers of the gospel. Now I don't know if you chose this for yourself, or if a former pastor set it up for you, but your bulletin, pretty nearly every week says just that. In the spot where it lists staff people, I am called your Pastor, but in the line that says Ministers – right after that it says, "All members."

You have been sent, by Jesus, and confirmed that by your own promises to love and serve his people in the world. It isn't now, and really has never been about seeing a church on every corner or filling up every empty spot in the pews. It's about what you do when you leave this place and interact with people in the rest of your busy week. I'm a bit more St. Francis in this aspect – Preach the gospel at all times, if necessary, use words. We may need to go a little farther than that. I hope you are out there with good PR for your church and what it is doing in the world. But in the end, it really isn't about brand loyalty, or whether you twist the arms of your friends to get them to come here. What I really want for you is to be able to share the love of Christ with the world, Lord knows, the world needs it, maybe now more than ever.

I also think this may be something you do more so than you already realize. So what I want to do today is to bring it to your attention so you can be aware of your gifts, and pray for Christ to multiply them, and maybe, just maybe find the courage to be a little more vulnerable in talking about your faith with others who may need to hear your word for the day. Here's a bit what it looks like. I decided to take a walk yesterday morning – without the dog or anyone else from my family. On my way to the path, an older woman who was walking her little dog said to me, “Have a blessed day.” I responded with, “Thank you, you too, I think it's going to be a beautiful one.” And she replied, “If that's what's in your heart, that's what it will be.” Exactly and Amen. Our conversation was short, but what a powerful way to start my morning, with that exchange and some silent solitude by the lake.

Now, after being here four years, I'm coming to know you. I know about your ministries in your broader world. I know that those of you who are teachers and librarians are ministers to your students and patrons. You equip them with knowledge and infuse their days with love. You give them a kind word when it's needed, but don't hesitate to push them to their greatest

potential. Those of you who own businesses find ways of caring for your employees and treating your customers fairly. You show hospitality and operate your workplace with compassion. But sometimes it's in your hobbies that you connect with folks. You form knitting circles and come together to golf. You go to your favorite coffee shop and minister to the barista and the friends you meet there from town. You volunteer in a variety of ways to make a difference. You raise money for charities. You adopt homeless pets. You attend parades and town events with pride and a sense of love for this community. You even pick up litter on your vacations to state parks. To me, those are all ministries of the gospel.

Jesus doesn't just tell us to love our neighbor because he wants us to be nice; he tells us that because our neighbors are exactly those people who God has given us to love. In Jesus' time, the word probably seemed a lot smaller than it does now. Our networks have grown less personal, and a whole lot bigger. It's tough to be loving to all our facebook friends, and yet, the true responsibility is to love all, and I mean all those people we come face to face with each day. Flo and Ella Mae are queens of this gift in their respective communities. Westminster Canterbury and Varina have ministers available to them on call, all the time, and may not even be aware of the ways these two women reach out over and over again in love. It's contagious too. I'm not sure how often they are rejected, and it's hard to imagine that they ever are – but persistence in love is amazing in what it can do.

Jesus reminds us in this passage that it is about us when it comes to being sent out, but it is up to God how God will ultimately use our gifts. We can let the outcomes go. Being outcomes driven doesn't help the church, it only hurts our reputation as being more about money and members than about love in the world. Love refuses be coerced or controlled. In this text, Jesus reminds the seventy to be quite simple in any protest, and quiet in victory. Just because we have

to shake the dust off our sandals this time, doesn't mean that our words or actions didn't make a difference for the next. And just because one church grows exponentially for awhile doesn't mean that it has any more right to brag than a small church quietly adding disciples to its fold a couple people at a time. The outcomes belong to God. But if we pay close attention, we will get to see what God is doing in the world – through a woman just out walking her dog, to the connections that really do save lives – for Christ's sake. Amen.