

Sermon: The Work of the Lord

In the past few weeks, we looked at what it is to be doing God's work as Jesus' hands on earth. We working for God and not God doing our work.

- We also looked at how we are transformed to do this work with confidence and with authority.
- And we saw that simply because God is mindful of us, when we live out God's plan for our lives, the Lord blesses us greatly by bringing heaven's bounty to us right here, right now.
- And we found that the key to the blessings of God is found in exercising our faith A faith that all people have without boundaries of race, class, or gender.
- And finally, we found that to fully access our faith in God, we need to turn to God again and again, nailing the barriers between us and the Lord Jesus to the cross, crucifying our sins and gaining the fruit of the Spirit.

Summary: We gain the fruit of the spirit

by exercising our faith

which gives us heaven's blessings,

by doing God's work with confidence and authority

instead of asking God to do what the Lord has given us to do as Jesus' hands on earth.

By this, we gain heaven by doing the work of the Lord.

So – what do we do with all of that?

Our story in Luke today is situated in the area of Galilee which is the entire area on the western side of the sea of Galilee. Jesus maintained a home there in Capernaum.

This is late in Jesus' ministry Journey. He has set his face toward Jerusalem and the cross (Luke 9:51) and is starting a journey of about 90 miles from Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee to Bethany and then Jerusalem.

There is a sense of urgency in the group:

When Jesus had planned to lodge in a Samaritan town, He was rejected there and suddenly other plans needed to be made.

Then Jesus quite suddenly sends out 72 disciples to prepare towns and villages for His arrival.

Jesus asks the disciples to pray to God for laborers because there is so much to be done and the time is right for a harvest, right now.

You could sense the urgency of the moment - as He prepares the disciples to go out, He sets about to take precautions:

He sent the disciples out in 2s and told them to travel light.

He told them he was sending them as sheep among wolves

He told them to plan for rejection

He told them to greet no one on the road

And he told them to remain in one home only, where peace was shared.

They were intentionally entering unknown spaces as people far separated from worldly power and status, they were to be clearly different.

He said, take no purse – no way to accumulate wealth, take only what is offered to you but accept everything that is offered – eat what is set before you, whatever it is.

This whole episode is a foreshadowing of Peter's lesson from God in Acts 10 where the disciple's most basic of Jewish understandings of the law of God are uprooted/torn down. Peter is told to kill and eat, that all that is made by God is acceptable. He clearly hears the message from God that the blessings from Jesus are made for all people, not just the Jews. Kosher laws of food – gone, separation of people by race and class and religion – gone.

This whole scene is shocking. Until now Jesus was teaching about who you can be and suddenly it's all about who you are, and about who others can be. It is all about preparing the ground for people to meet Jesus.

And Jesus was vastly and quite suddenly expanding the numbers and the physical reach of His ministry.

In Luke 9 Jesus prepared and sent out the 12 apostles into the villages around Capernaum, where they were. Now in Luke 10 Jesus sends out 72 in pairs of two to the cities and villages and places he intended to go ahead of Him.

Later, in Acts 1, Jesus tells the Apostles that "...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (vs 8) The ministry was expanding.

He was not speaking to one assistant, 1 apostle, he was speaking to 12 Apostles and 72 disciples who together, helping each other grow, and understand, and

empower, would change the world. By the time the disciples receive the Holy Spirit's anointing at Pentecost, there are 120 in the group.

Looking at this passage from Luke verse by verse, it's reasonable to assume that Jesus equipped the 72 with the same powers to cure diseases and cast out demons as He did with the Apostles in Luke 9. The main difference was that Jesus had told the 12 that they were to preach in Galilee, avoiding Gentile areas and Samaria, but the 72 were given no such restriction. 2 by 2 they were to go to every town preparing the way for Jesus, bringing near the kingdom of God. Like John the Baptist, they were to "...prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Is 40:3)

In verse 2 Jesus explained the uniqueness of the moment that any farmer would understand; the day of the harvest when the field is bursting and ready for picking.

In the scene with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus chided his disciples when they questioned him talking to the woman. He said: "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35) He used this same metaphor of the harvest when He sent out the 12 Apostles.

In both events he also told them to "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." In other words, pray for the work you are about to do, pray for the work you do to be amplified as it is in the Parable of the Sower, he had recently explained to them, so that it would reap a harvest "...a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." (Matthew 13, Luke 8)

Can you get a sense of their excitement and enthusiasm at this point?

They are headed away from their homes, their teacher has paired them up to go into communities they do not know, with power they have never had nor used.

They have been sent with warnings and expectations. Warnings like verse 3: Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. But they know that they are not just "out there". They have the confidence and authority of the one who told them "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11)

These 72 were preparing for the work of Jesus, preparing the way for the Messiah. They are prepared to do the same work as the of Apostles, who had been with Christ for his entire ministry. They are prepared for the same successes

and failures the Apostles had experienced, the same that we might experience doing God's labor.

In verse 11, Jesus tells them specifically how to respond to rejection; how to leave with the same confidence and authority, telling any who reject them that "The kingdom of God has come near. Even though this sounds like rejection, it is true evangelism at work. Even in apparent failure, they are planting seeds and setting the stage for further evangelism, for the kingdom to eventually come to the people, not just to be near, but to be there.

We sometimes wonder if our efforts, as the hands of Jesus, bear fruit in others. We are reminded that maybe the best we can do with another person is to plant a seed and let it germinate for later.

The apostle Paul said the same of his own work in Corinth, where he labored starting a church for over 1 ½ years. Another disciple, Apollos, had taught of Jesus there also.

Paul said: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6,7).

Our job is to plant and water seeds. God's job is to make things grow.¹

And verse 16 speaks to this dilemma when Jesus equated rejection of the disciples with rejection of himself and of God. But the process of evangelism and discipleship means playing the long game. Our immediate opportunity for doing the work of the Lord is often fleeting, just a moment of interaction, yet we still have verse 11, where listeners in any town are given the opportunity to see that the Messiah and His power, the kingdom of heaven here and now, are near – in their neighborhood.

If you had heard this, wouldn't you start asking around?

It might sound like this:

"Hey Bob, what did you hear about these preachy guys that came into Westerly? Yeah, they left pretty upset but there were others like them over in Weekapaug and in Watch Hill and I heard that they said and did some pretty amazing things. John's kid, you know the one with the bum leg, well they healed him! And, their leader, the one called Jesus, is walking on the waterside down Atlantic Ave tomorrow. I think I'm going to go over and check him out..."

¹ <https://www.navigators.org/blog/evangelism-starts-with-planting-seeds/> accessed 7/1/22

So, in life, if you need to get more done because time is short or the harvest is large then as they say: “many hands make light work.” Jesus deployed many hands and they came back “With Joy!” Sometimes, the results speak for themselves.

When they returned to the group, they said, “Lord, in your name even demons submitted to us.”

And doing the work of the Lord is not trivial work, it is life altering.

The disciples were going out with the power of Jesus at hand, a power to cast out demons, to heal the sick and lame, to usher the Holy Spirit into empty souls.

This was heady work and they came back boasting, but you could almost see the Lord nodding his head with understanding saying “yes, yes, I saw your work in action” — “I saw Satan fall from heaven, like lightning.

Jesus was not saying that Satan was defeated by the works of the 72 but that by casting out demons, they effected the power He gave them to “trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy”. He gave them power to stomp on the minions of the evil one and He saw the beginning of Satan’s downfall. As they battled against the angels of Satan, they were “falling like lightning from heaven.”²

The defeat of the power of Satan is an important theme throughout the Bible. In Isaiah 14:12 the prophet sings “How you have fallen from heaven, O day-star, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the ground, O destroyer of nations.

And Peter teaches us that “... God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment... (2 Peter 2:4)

And Revelation prophesizes in a vision when “... the great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Revelation 12:9)

The serpent and the scorpion are symbols of spiritual evil that Jesus gives His followers power to defeat. When we nail the barriers between us and the Lord

² Joel Green, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 418

God to the cross, we stomp on our serpents and scorpions and gain the fruit of God's spirit for doing the work of the Lord.

The real kernel of the promise of verse 19 lies in our authority to defeat Satan's minion in this world knowing that the Lord is with us, protecting us from harm. When we are doing the Lord's work with confidence and authority we are exercising our faith which give us heaven's blessings and promises that "nothing shall separate us from the love of God," and that "all things work together for good to those that love Him" (Romans 8:39; Romans 8:28) ³

And Jesus' words in verse 20 are the crux of the matter. Jesus reminds them of what they and He are there for and says: 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." The point of service in God's name is to spread the good news of the gospel, to offer those who do not know God a cool cup of water, an opportunity for a relationship unto infinity with the Savior.

We should always be looking to see that we are rightly focused on the kingdom and not checking ourselves out in the mirror, making sure that we are doing well in the sight of others instead of in the sight of God.

So, what calls us here today?

In the military we would call this the bottom line up front or the BLUF. Clarifying why we do what we do as Jesus hands on earth. We do it to expand God's kingdom here; to prepare the way just as the disciples did for the Spirit of the Lord to do God's work in the souls of all we meet.

God did something miraculous in this world for his people and sent His Son to give us a way to atone for the messes that we are.

Then God sent the Holy Spirit to his people to be his church on earth; to take care of His people.

So, would we not, as his people, be the ones to do something miraculous in our time?

Is this not our task? Are we not called to do the work of God? Are we not called to love our neighbor, not just by prayer but by action?

³ Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, <https://biblehub.com/luke/10-19.htm> accessed 6/27/22

We are reminded that none of this makes any sense or has any real value without the experience of a transformed heart, a heart transformed by the Lord Jesus.

That transformation that sets us apart, for eternity.

Without a transformation in the soul, this whole book just turns into a list of things we think we need to do but that we can never ever accomplish. We must know Christ.

To be set apart for God's service, having the benefits and blessings of heaven in our mortal lives, takes more than just wanting it to be that way. Being a Christ follower does not just mean being a "good person". Being a Christ follower does not mean that you are a "in God we Trust" American or that your mom or dad were Christ followers. It actually takes a personal act of submission to a God who is worthy of worship and of service.

It's very much like a movie theater – no ticket, no seat.

Jesus said in Mathew 7: 22 - ²² On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' ²³ But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

A friend sent me a song his son had written and recorded, feeling a very proud father. The melody was beautiful, the singing voice exceptional. Easy to listen to and enjoy. But the lyrics left me wondering. It spoke of facing difficulty in life, of wondering what the point of it all is, wondering how to make a difference. And he offered no answers other than just to sit back and breath. Like we have all the answers inside of us if we just relax and let life flow over us. The emptiness was breathtaking.

Any Christian music artist from the mellow to the screamer band could have finished that song. It would acknowledge that Jesus has the answer. When I have nowhere to turn because I have run out of my answers, God is there for me with open arms, with scarred hands, with infinite grace. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit begins before we start and takes over when we run out of everything we have for answers, God heals our wounds in a world where we live every day with ourselves, with our world, and with the powers of Satan working against us. But, we are those laborers Jesus was talking about. The disciples were told to pray for

us to help with the harvest. No matter how we serve, when we are working for the Lord, we are the answer to prayer for a bountiful harvest.

Psalm 30 is a perfect expression of how we live as people of God along life's journey.

It stands as a pattern of how we live our lives with God. It's a rollercoaster. We experience joy and give thanks, then we feel pain and we cry for help, then we feel forgotten by God and we are dismayed, then we feel recognized and satisfied because "weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning", then we are elated and our wailing turns into dancing! It's funny that this cycle that we constantly go through brings about in us a renewed trust in an unchanging God. It's always all about us.

Even as Christian disciples, we waver, we falter, and we actually wonder if God is with us even though we have promises from the Lord like:

I will be their God and they will be my people
and promises from Jesus that he would never leave us nor forsake us.

Like being a parent of spoiled children, it must be painful being our God because we are so very very needy and it takes a lot of support for high maintenance people like ourselves. Thank the Lord we serve a patient God.

Jesus came. And by the grace given to you and me, we have been given gifts for God's service. We are the workers Jesus and the disciples were praying for, the workers who can preach and teach and encourage and give and support and be a loving neighbor. By our actions, we are the hands of Jesus, blessed in our work for the Lord. This is what we are called to do when the harvest is ready as it is right now.

Amen.