

“Your names are written!” Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 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. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘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.’”

“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. 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. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

What a great reading we have for our today’s reflections from the gospel according to Luke. Jesus Himself sending His seventy disciples and providing them with instructions and necessary encouragement to carry out their mission.

What could be better than to hear from our Lord and Master Himself how to go about this great and joyful adventure that we too are called to participate in. Today we will reflect only on three of many different questions this rich text addresses.

First, what is required to follow Jesus, what does it take to be Jesus’ disciple? Second, what is it that we are sent to deliver to others? Third, where can we get the power or inspiration to carry out this great mission?

First, what does the following Jesus require? What does it take to be Jesus’ disciple? So, what are the criteria? Do you need to be a moral person? Do you need to have a clean slate? Do you need to be particularly gifted? Do you need a specific education? Certain IQ? Someone to vouch for you? Are there any hoops you need to jump through before you can become Jesus’ disciple? You know the answer.

All we need is God's grace, and our willingness to humbly receive it. Whoever you are, whatever your past may be like, whichever way you may have sinned and failed and messed things up, there is abundance of divine grace for everyone. Everyone is welcomed to join the community of Jesus' disciples. Everyone!

We can see it throughout the Scripture. Different sorts of people from various backgrounds were welcomed into God's family. Liars, cowards, crooks, murderers, adulterers, bandits, prostitutes, the most marginalized elements of society.

Vivid examples abound. Our Triune God desires everyone to come to the knowledge of truth and to be saved. Thus, on the one hand, no requirements, nothing is expected, just come as a beggar, willing to receive God's gifts.

But then, we can see this pattern through the Bible, whenever God calls someone, He also... yes... sends them. Jesus had gathered His disciples, mixed bag from all walks of life, He blessed them with His presence, He elevated them, He filled them with His Holy Spirit, He made them wise by His teaching and then... He sent them.

And as Jesus sent them, He also described what situations they will face, and not much has changed since then. **"I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves."** We live in the world that is exceedingly hostile to the true God.

And into this hostile environment Jesus sends His Church, us including, to deliver His message. It is not an easy task, not at all. We prefer loving and friendly communities. Don't we? We prefer to be accepted and praised by others.

How often do we remain silent, fearing what people may think about me, even as the Lord opens for us opportunities to deliver His message? Sometimes hostility is real, but how often it is simply our fear of discomfort, of not being welcomed?

It is so much easier to stay where we feel comfortable, among those who are like us and who like us, than to engage with people who are different, who don't share our convictions, who may look down at us, or even despise us for our Christian faith.

Jesus says that we will experience both – places and homes and people, who will gladly welcome us, and will rejoice in the message we bring, what a joy! but there will also be those, who will reject us exactly because we come in Jesus' name.

It requires a certain kind of person to follow Jesus. It requires a certain commitment. It requires grit. Courage to speak and not to remain silent. Courage to face our own fears, and also indifference and possibly even rejection from people we may value.

It requires readiness to suffer as Jesus suffered for the sake of the truth, for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of the same people who may show their hostility towards us. It requires someone special. Someone who is ... just like you.

That's right, just like you. Because Jesus doesn't call some super-heroes to be His disciples, He calls everyone. He sends everyone, ordinary people like us. Do you know why? Because it is Him who gives His messengers super-powers.

The success of Jesus' mission does not depend on our abilities or lack of them, but on the power of His Spirit. We are Jesus' messengers, earthly clay vessels, imperfect and fearful, carrying this divine treasure – the new life-giving Gospel message, but as we go, we do not go alone, the Spirit of God is our faithful companion, He is our super-power like no other.

But there is more, Jesus also provides for us all the support we may need. Very tangibly. Remember, when Jesus sent out the seventy, He didn't send them out on their own. He sent them two by two. And you are not alone either. You don't need to embark on this great mission on your own. Not at all. Just look around!

All these brothers and sisters, and many, many more, your pastor – Jesus has placed them all in your life, and you into their lives, so that as one body of Christ, as one community of saints we could help and support one another.

So that we could pray for one another. So that we could tap into our collective, God supplied wisdom, so that we can have everything that is needed. Those are not some empty slogans – Jesus, indeed, provides for us what we need.

Our second question was about what is it that we are sent to deliver to people.

The devil a master of confusion. He makes people believe that black is white, and white black, good is evil and evil good. We witness it every day.

Similarly, he has worked hard to discredit the message of Jesus. So often it is portrayed as some obsolete religious ideas, as our private opinions that we Christians try to force on others. Something that is out of place and time.

And if people are deceived to perceive our message in such negative light, why would they listen? Worse, sometimes he deceives Christians to believe the same, and then why would we even try to share something of so little importance?

But nothing can be further from the truth. How did Jesus say to His disciples:

“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ... and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”

So, what is it that we are sent to deliver? Briefly – the Kingdom of God and God's peace. Remember how Jesus said: **“Whoever listens to you listens to me, whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”**

When you go as Jesus' disciple with His message, you go and you speak with the authority of the Father and the Son, and in the power of God's own Spirit. Just think about it... ... **“Peace be to this house, and the Kingdom of God has come near.”**

When our Triune God speaks through you, His words do what they say. God's peace is brought to those our fellow humans and the Kingdom of God comes near to them. If only we could understand how beautiful, how essential this mission is!

Now about that peace? What does that mean? This greeting comes already from the Old Testament, and we may know it better as Shalom! It is not a peace as the

absence of war or of all the trouble. This peace, Shalom, it is the state of being for which we are created. The state of complete and all-embracing well-being. When everything in our lives is as it is supposed to be.

It begins with our relationships with our God. When we know Him as our gracious Father and our committed and forgiving Redeemer. When embraced and filled by His Spirit we fear, love and trust Him above all things. But this Shalom extends also to all our others relationships.

When God reveals to us His wisdom for how to live in this world. When His Spirit comes and changes our hearts and the hearts of people around us. When hatred and strife ceases and mutual care, love and faithfulness abound in our relationships, families, churches. When we get to taste that the Lord is good.

This is the kind of peace we are sent to deliver. And as we deliver God's message, and if people listen to it, this is what the Word of God brings them. It creates new lives for them. Full of this peace, and joy, and wisdom, and beauty and so on.

Now a bit about the Kingdom of God, how does it come near to us? As Luther explained it in the Small Catechism: "*How does God's kingdom come?* God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity." See, this is what we are sent to deliver to all people.

This peace, Shalom, and the Kingdom of God. There are no greater gifts than these, and it is certainly worth to suffer rejection, if that's what it takes, trying to deliver these divine gifts to those whom we love. For if don't do that, how will they receive this peace, and how will the Kingdom come near to them?

Finally, our third question. About where to get the power or inspiration to take on this mission. What motivates us as fallen human beings? Often it is about seeing results of our efforts, or even better - receiving praise and glory for what we have accomplished. How sweet that is!

Surely, there is place for these things in our lives, but perhaps not when it comes to our participation in Jesus' mission. For one, we may or may not see much results. That's right. The Words of God will not return empty, that is the promise.

But nowhere it is promised that we will be able to enjoy the results of our efforts. We are sent as His messengers, but that is the Triune God Himself who creates faith "where and when it pleases Him" (AC V).

We can take comfort in the fact that Jesus' disciples were no different that we are. They too rejoiced in the visible results of God's work through them. Remember how they returned to Jesus, rejoicing and saying that: **"Even the demons submit to us!"**

But what did Jesus say to them? Where did He redirect their attention? **“Do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”** That’s it! This is the sources of your power and inspiration.

This beautiful reality, that your eternal future in the age to come is already secured. Your Father and your Lord Jesus has already written your name in heaven. This is where you belong, in God’s family as His heir. Your name is already written in the book of life. Nothing and no one can erase it from there.

Surely, we can still reject this gift, and many people do, that is scary to watch. But if you hold to Jesus, if you allow Him to hold you regularly listening to His Word and receiving His Sacrament, nothing and no one will be able to separate you from God’s love and everything that He has prepared for you. So, rejoice!

That is most certainly true. And because we are assured that this is true, and because we have been blessed with such incredible divine, heavenly gifts, how else could we express our gratitude to our Father and Jesus if not trying to deliver God’s peace to others and thus seeing the Kingdom of God growing.

That’s for our reflections today. Even if we don’t think we have what it takes to be Jesus’ messengers, He abundantly provides for us, and He sends us to deliver the most beautiful, most precious message of God’s grace and love.

We literary deliver eternal life to those who have ears to listen. And even if we stumble or face hostility, our Lord Jesus is faithful, He not only walks with us in our weakness, He will accomplish His plan, and He will get everyone of His chosen ones to be with Him forever for that heavenly feast that never ends.

Therefore, let’s rejoice, brothers and sisters! For your names already are written in heaven. They are.

Amen.