

UNEDITED DRAFT

The Scripture before us today challenges us to remember and focus on the purpose of Christ's church. Two questions: "What is the church?" and "What is our purpose?" Can you easily answer those questions? What is the church? For some it is a building that carries the name "Good Shepherd." For others church is a kind of social gathering. Many would probably say, "I'm not sure, I just know I'm supposed to go." The church as defined in the Bible are all of those who have been called out of this sinful world who follow the voice of their Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. All who trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin and death make up the body of Christ. We are one in faith as we walk together following him.

But what is our purpose? Why do we gather here at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church? Again, confusion abounds. Scripture says, we gather here to receive from God his Word and Sacraments to strengthen our connection to Jesus. We encourage one another in the faith. And, an enormous part of our purpose is to go and make disciples of all nations. We are to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with our community and with the world.

Maybe we could simplify it this way: Here at Good Shepherd, we have a ministry to insiders and a ministry to outsiders. That ministry is to connect people to Christ. People who are already connected are the insiders. Their faith must grow. They need help as they struggle with sin. They need to meet regularly and worship. But a major part of our focus is also a ministry to outsiders. That is, we need to reach out to those who do not yet know Christ and connect them to him.

It's about that purpose of the church that we're going to talk about today. It is essential that we are reaching out with Christ to our community. That's easy to say, it's harder to do. It's easy to acknowledge that this is a major focus of the church. It's much harder to keep it as a major focus of the church. All churches gravitate toward serving and ministering to insiders, rather than serving and ministering toward outsiders... the unchurched. It's not that we don't love them. It's just that the only voices we here are the voices of the insiders. And they naturally think about themselves and other insiders. When the church budget is being set, it's the insiders that set the budget. We don't even consult with the unchurched when we set out budget. So insider ministries tend to get funded. When we talk about plans, activities, etc., again, we gravitate toward doing those things which help the insiders, not the outsiders.

Today in our Scripture reading, Jesus challenges us to come back to center. He reminds us of the vitally important work he has given us to go and reach the lost. He reminds us that the harvest is plentiful. There are lots of unchurched people out there who desperately need a connection to Christ. The problem is not that there is a lack of people that need to come to follow Jesus. The problem is that there are not enough harvesters going out into the field. So let's listen carefully and ask the honest and hard questions. Do we as a church need to shift our focus or refocus so that we are always considering the outsider and the vital ministry to them of connecting them to Christ?

Luke 10:1-12, 16-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

Remember that Jesus is still traveling toward Jerusalem. Jesus had a heart for outsiders. Those were not yet children of God, not yet a part of the flock, they needed to be brought in. So he has a plan to reach more. We will do well to pay attention to this plan and consider what his will is for us at Good Shepherd.

Jesus reminds us that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. So what should we do? We should pray. Pray that the Lord would send out more workers into the harvest field. If this isn't already a daily part of your prayer life, would you add this to your prayer list? It's easy for us to remember to pray for ourselves, our family, our friends and fellow members of our church. It's much harder to remember to pray for people we don't know... especially people that aren't church goers. But Jesus says to pray. Pray for more harvesters.

Right after telling his followers to say that prayer, he says:

“Go! I am sending you.” It's like he says, “Okay, did you say that prayer like I told you? Everyone done praying? Good news! God has just answered your prayer! Go! I am sending you!” I want you to remember this. As you pray daily for God to send more workers into the harvest field, don't be at all surprised when God says, “Prayer answered! I am sending you!” All believers have their own personal mission field where they can share the good news of Jesus.

Now let's read about this specific calling of the 72.

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. “When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’

Jesus tells them things to do, and things not to do.

1) Watch out for wolves. Jesus is the chief shepherds. Pastors and church leaders are undershepherds. The flock is the people. The wolves are those who hate the flock of Christ. They will tell lies, they will teach moral compromise, they will spread false teaching. The wolves want to draw people to themselves. Wolves aren't about sending, they're about taking. They want to compromise your service to God, compromise God's truth, compromise God's authority and power by trying to take it for themselves. The wolves destroy the sheep.

2) Be an instrument of God's peace. Their goal is to bring what everyone lacks because of sin. Tell them that God is not pleased with who you are and what you have done, But there is peace with God through Christ. He lived as you should live. He died as you should die. And he rose. And because of him there is peace between you and God where there was hostility. Be a loving Christian wants to bring Jesus' peace to others!

3) Receive whatever people provide. Don't bring your checkbook, ATM card, money. Talk to people about Jesus. Eat what they provide. Start a home group in that home. If they want to provide you with money, take it.

4) Heal the sick and cast out evil spirits. The best way to explain part of their calling is this: Make the invisible kingdom visible. Demonstrate God's power and love in an outward, visible way. That doesn't only happen with amazing things like healings and driving out demons. It happens any time you show God's love to another. Be kind, compassionate, generous, giving, selfless, in your relationship with others, and you are making the invisible kingdom, visible.

1) Don't bring money, supplies or even an extra pair of shoes! They brought spare shoes like you bring a spare tire. But Jesus said don't. They were to rely upon the generosity of others.

2) An odd one: Don't greet anyone on the road. Long, drawn out conversations about the weather or about nothing important are a waste of time. Talk about Jesus, and if they're receptive, talk to them. Don't idly chat. The time is short. The harvest is plentiful. Who would come to church if you just ask? If they say no, ask another, then another. My Dad taught me, "It doesn't hurt to ask." If you find someone argumentative, move on. Don't ignore them, but pray for them, and invest in those that want to listen. Or in young Christians that need you to invest in them.

3) Don't move around. Stay in the house that receives you. Have a church. Build one another up. Make it an outpost of the kingdom of God. Do ministry there. If that home fills up, then you spill over into another home. This is how the kingdom of God grows and multiplies. It happens on a one on one basis. It happens in our home. Your home belongs to Jesus. A group should be meeting there. Imagine seeing the harvest of the Kingdom of God on your livingroom couch! Jesus worked from homes. They gathered for large group, they scattered to their homes and lives. This is how the church was built.

But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

The message is the same for those who receive and reject. The kingdom of God is near. For those being saved, that is a promise filled with great joy. For the one who rejects, it is a threat of immanent judgment.

"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

There are only two possible responses to Jesus. Those who reject you are actually rejecting Jesus. That's important! It's hard not to take it personally. But it's not about you. It's about Jesus.

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the

enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

The ones who were sent once again gathered and they talked about their victories for Christ. They celebrated together.

We certainly have much to celebrate here at Good Shepherd. For over 60 years, the Word of God has been faithfully preached. Through that Good News about Jesus, how many people have come to know Jesus? How many have been strengthened in their faith? But as I look to the future, I see so much more left to do. How many more in Omaha are unchurched and need to be connected to Jesus? Let's recommit ourselves to reaching the unchurched. Let's intentionally ask what it would look like if we were to become more and more a church for outsiders since we naturally gravitate toward being a church for insiders. Specifically, let's do what Jesus said. Here are the next steps:

PRAY: Every one of us pray every day that there would be more workers for the harvest. Pray for those that don't know Jesus. Pray for the outreach opportunities. Pray for our leadership. Pray that God would raise up future leaders. Pray for our school. Pray for our Sudanese ministry. And as you pray, keep your eyes open, because God is going to make you a part of the answer to those prayers!

GO: Invite and serve. Where is God sending you? Who do you know who is unchurched. If you're not sure, ask someone. Invite them to come to church with you. Ask them to come to a fellowship event. Invite them into your living room and share Jesus. You are sent! Remember you are sharing a message of peace. Remember that you are also called to show in a visible way the invisible kingdom through your love and service to others and acts of kindness.

Consider: Do we live in a consumer culture or serving, giving culture? Which does our church reflect? I come to church to... get? Give? Where do you serve? How much do you give? In these homes, they were Christians for 15 minutes and they immediately fed and supported the missionaries, used their home as a church, helped provide a salary, etc.

SUPPORT: Our reading showed us of the importance of those who support ministry. There were those who opened their homes, and gave meals to the disciples, and who gave money to support what the disciples were doing. How has God positioned you to support those who share the Gospel?

TRUST the Lord in all of this and **REJOICE** together. That means let's celebrate the victories. Celebrate steps that make us a more outsider-focused church. Celebrate when a person comes to faith. Celebrate when we perform acts of love and service. Pray, go, support, trust and rejoice. Those are our next steps.

The harvest is plentiful! The workers are few. Let's recommit ourselves to being harvesters! Amen.