First Presbyterian Church of Soda Springs

July 3, 2022

Healed

Luke 10:1-11

**1**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. **2**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. **3**Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. **4**Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. **5**Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ **6**And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. **7**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. **8**Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; **9**cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you. **10**But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, **11**‘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.

I want to start out by saying that today marks the one-year anniversary of being in this pulpit as your pastor. It’s been an extraordinary year; one of change and growth, laughter and tears, friendship and love, lots and lots of good food (I swear I’ve gained at least 10 pounds this past year) and yes, some disagreement and challenges too. I am truly grateful that you have entrusted me to be the one who helps y’all gain a better understanding of God’s word. It’s a privilege, an honor and a responsibility that I don’t take lightly. I’ll note, for the record, that this hasn’t just been a one-way street, as y’all have given me opportunities to see scripture in a different light, as well (thank you Tuesday night Bible Study). Here’s to many more years of working together building up the Kingdom of God in our corner of the world.

Early on, in my career, I was told that most preachers have a maximum, of maybe two or three sermons in them and all the rest are simply variations on those two or three themes. When I heard that, being somewhat naive about this preaching thing, I laughed. But as I got into the rhythm of weekly preaching, I saw the truth in that statement. It’s pretty clear to me, looking back over the past year, that most of my sermons revolve around the two themes of “All Means All, Y’all,” and “Being God’s Hands and Feet in the World.”

Today, I want to take a slightly different approach to the sermon, and talk a bit about what it means when “All Means All, Y’all,” actually happens. I’ll do my best to tie what I’m about to say to our Luke reading, and we’ll see how it goes.

There are some interesting things to note about today’s Gospel reading. First, this is the only place where we hear about Jesus sending out the seventy. This event doesn’t appear in Matthew, Mark or John and I’m not sure why that is, honestly. But I imagine this is one of those times where it was important for Luke’s specific audience to hear these particular words. The second thing I find interesting, is that the reading tells us that Jesus sent out seventy others. There’s nothing indicating whether or not those sent were all men or if there were women in the mix. A traditional interpretation assumes that those sent were all men, but again, since there is no actual description of who Jesus sent, I have to believe that there would have been women among those Jesus commissioned to take the Gospel out into the world.

Why the number seventy? Why that particular number? Why not fifty or one hundred? Why not two hundred, or more? The commentaries I looked at, as I was doing my sermon prep, note that the number seventy is a reference to Genesis 10, where we find a list of all the known nations of the world, at that point in time. My understanding of what Luke is saying here then, is that the Gospel is meant for all peoples, and all the nations of the earth.

So, Jesus has commissioned seventy people to go out and share the good news of the Gospel to places that he intended to go. There’s quite a bit of urgency in the commission, as we see in verse 4, where Jesus tells those he’s sending out to *“Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.”* I believe that in addition to the urgency, which is very obvious here, we are also being reminded to trust that God will provide whatever we need, in order to fulfill this call. Go right now, and don’t worry about anything else because God will take care of you. That’s a leap of faith I’m honestly not sure I’d be able to take, truth be told.

You’ll notice, that verses 5 and 6 use the word peace three times and that’s not an accident or some fluke of the translation process. I see the combination of verses 4, 5 and 6, as the main point of this entire reading, where Jesus is calling us to urgently share the peace of the Gospel with all peoples of the world.

When we take the Gospel out into our communities and the world, like the seventy sent by Jesus, we not only have the opportunity to provide peace to those who accept the Gospel, but we also provide an opportunity for all peoples to be healed and made whole through the Gospel message.

As I’ve said before, Jesus did not set out to establish a brand-new religion. His goal was to reform the religious practices of the day which had morphed into something that had very little to do with the original practice of the Jewish faith. Over the centuries, more and more things had been added to the original ten commandments, more and more laws had been put into place, and it had become very difficult to obey all of the rules. And if one rule was broken, that was it, you were out. This reality of a legalistic faith, where an “us verse them” dynamic where those who followed all the commandments were seen as good and those who didn’t being seen as bad, had become common place and was exactly what Jesus set out to undo. Matthew 22:37-40 tells us that when asked by a Pharisee what the greatest commandment was, Jesus answered, *“****37*** *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’* ***38****This is the greatest and first commandment.* ***39****And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* ***40****On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets”* This is the message of peace and healing that Jesus commissioned the seventy to take out into the world. When we hear, accept and obey these two things, everything else has a tendency to fall into place. We Christians, haven’t done a very good job of living into these two commandments, and many people have been deeply hurt as a result.

Before I came here, I had the great honor and privilege of serving as the organizing pastor of Stonewall Ministries, in the Palm Springs area. Stonewalls motto is “Healing Spiritual Wounds,” and we attracted a variety of folks from all walks of life, each with a horror story of how they had been treated by the institutional church.

Stonewall isn’t what you’d consider to be a “typical” church. Most members don’t show up in suits and ties or nice dresses, although some do. Tattoos and piercings and non-traditional hairstyles are the norm. The age of the members ranges from mid-twenties to late eighties and sometimes, there’s a fair amount of cussing. I’ll admit that I was known in that congregation as the cussing pastor, a nickname I carried with pride. Some of the spiritual wounds experienced by these folks are fresh, some of the wounds are decades old, but all of the stories are painful to hear. Stonewall is, by design, a church of and for misfits. It’s a place where people who wouldn’t fit into a “regular church” can find peace and healing in the Gospel message. And that church is thriving because there are so few places like it.

Let me tell you about my friend Marshall. I met Marshall at the Presbyterian church I attended, prior to starting Stonewall, where he was serving as a Deacon. We became friends and started hanging out together and one day he came to me in tears. “What’s wrong,” I asked? “I don’t believe in God anymore,” was the reply. I asked him why and Marshall’s response was that he couldn’t believe in a God who wouldn’t love him for who he was. I was saddened, but not at all surprised. You see, Marshall identifies as a gay man and just the previous Sunday, our pastor had preached a fiery sermon denouncing gay folks. The sermon had been filled with hate, vitriol, bigotry and language that I never expected to hear in church. It was most definitely not an “all means all, y’all” type of message, and it had taken everything I had in me not to walk out.

Now, it did cross my mind that Marshall might have been overreacting. However, I soon realized the wound inflicted that day, was deep. He had come to church that morning seeking peace and healing and it had taken only one hate filled sermon for him to say, “That’s enough, I’m done.”

After hearing other people who had been in attendance that Sunday, tell me about how painful it had been to sit through that particular sermon, the idea for Stonewall was born. About a year later, I went to Marshall and asked him if he’d be willing to serve on the Leadership Team. At first, he declined. “I don’t believe in God, and I don’t want anything to do with it,” he said. Well, I can be persistent and, over the course of the next few months, I kept asking him. Finally, he told me “OK, I’ll come to church, but that’s it and it’s just to shut you up!” Fast forward a few more months, and Marshall not only joined Stonewall, but ultimately became chair of the Leadership Team and, as of last week, has enrolled in seminary to become a pastor.

I don’t share this story to brag, because I was simply the agent of the Holy Spirit, in this case. It was the acceptance of a group of misfits, and an adherence to the Gospel message of love and healing, that turned Marshall’s life around.

Stonewall Ministries and Soda Springs Presbyterian don’t, on the surface, seem to have much in common. Stonewall is less than 10 years old, while we here at Soda Springs are preparing to celebrate our 130th anniversary this year. We lean towards traditional worship, were as Stonewalls worship style can best be described as experimental. There are other differences between these two communities of faith, but there’s one thing that both congregations have in common, and it’s the absolute conviction that the Gospel is a message of peace and healing available to anyone, without exception.

I have no doubt in my mind that if anyone here were to walk into Stonewall Ministries, you’d be welcomed with open arms and if anyone from Stonewall were to walk in here, the same would be true. The love and acceptance I have seen and experienced here, make it very clear why this church is considered to be the heart of our community.

The seventy were sent by Jesus to share the Gospel of peace and healing to all peoples of the world. There were no exceptions then and there can be no exceptions now. That message of peace and healing is as relevant today, as it was 2,000 years ago.

May this place continue to be a place of hospitality and love; a place where the Gospel isn’t just pretty words on a page, but a place where the peace and healing of the Gospel message is lived out in everything we say, and everything we do

**AMEN**