

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 07/03/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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### Practicalities of disciple-making

Following on from last week's Gospel lection highlighting the cost of discipleship, this week's text provides some detailed insight into the Master's disciple-making ministry, including specific methodologies. Spoiler Alert: He does not use a sermon, a lecture on discipleship, a Sunday School class, a Bible study group, a book study on what somebody else said about what somebody else said about discipleship, or a church program.

#### Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

*<sup>1</sup> After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*

Earlier in Luke, Jesus gives power and authority to His twelve apostles and sends them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal (Luke 9:1-6). In this text Jesus now does the same with seventy-two others (some equally reliable manuscripts state seventy). Some commentators argue this text is a variant of Matthew's account of sending out the twelve apostles (Matthew 9:37-10:15), however, since Luke has already mentioned Jesus sending out the twelve, it is reasonable to take this account at face value and consider this another occasion.

Most interpreters agree that it is not possible to decide whether the number of disciples is seventy or seventy-two. Regardless, no doctrinal issue is at stake. Some commentators point out the number of disciples symbolically refers to the number of nations of the world as mentioned in Genesis 10. In the Hebrew text there are seventy names and in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation there are seventy-two names. There is also conjecture this number relates to the number of elders appointed by Moses (seventy-two) or the members of the Sanhedrin (seventy) who should have been preparing for the coming of the Messiah. What is clear is that Jesus worked with a larger number of disciples beyond the twelve apostles.

Sending them out in pairs satisfies the requirement of two witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). Just as in our day, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. We are to pray earnestly for workers.

*<sup>3</sup> Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.*

<sup>7</sup> *And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.* <sup>8</sup> *Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you.* <sup>9</sup> *Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*

Jesus gives specific instructions on how the disciples should behave during this assignment. First, Jesus is clear this is no easy task - "as lambs in the midst of wolves." Behaving as lambs also refers how the disciples are not to seek conversion by force, unlike many religions and cults today. The disciples are to carry no moneybag or purse. This means the disciples should look to God for daily provision. Neither should they ask for money. Since Jesus is telling them what not to carry, "no sandals" means the disciples should not take an extra pair with them. In other words, the disciples should not be cluttered by worldly baggage. "Greet no one on the road" is not about being discourteous but refers to focusing on the mission and not being distracted by the elaborate eastern salutation practices along the way.

The disciples are then instructed to only bless those who wish to receive a blessing (vv.5,6). They are to stay in the first house they are accepted rather than going from house to house. This means the disciples should not seek better accommodations in each town, nor should they accept invitations to stay at other homes (and thus act as some sort of celebrity) otherwise they would stay too long in one town at the expense of the delivering the Message elsewhere. The worker deserves a wage, but the worker should not demand a wage. They are to eat and drink only what is provided. This may also have included Gentile homes. The servant of the crucified Christ should not be a seeker of luxury. There are accounts from those days of false prophets staying in homes for long periods without working and demanding money and food.

The purpose of the disciples is clear - to heal the sick and to proclaim the Kingdom.

<sup>10</sup> *But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say,* <sup>11</sup> *'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'*

The disciples are instructed on what they should do to towns that do not receive them. The idea of shaking the dust off their feet is a practice that Jews would do when leaving a Gentile area - the mere dust from that area being unclean. This represents a symbolic judgment. Even so, the disciples also proclaim the message in the streets of such towns. This illustrates that the Christian worker is accountable to proclaim the Message in words and actions but leaves the outcome up to God.

<sup>16</sup> *"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."*

The sheer importance of spreading the Message cannot be underestimated (v.16).

<sup>17</sup> *The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"*

<sup>18</sup> *And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.* <sup>19</sup> *Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.*

<sup>20</sup> *Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

Jesus checks in and debriefs with the disciples on their return. Their feedback is very positive, stating even the demons are subject to them "in His name." Jesus cautions them against pride. "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" perhaps refers to Lucifer's fall from Heaven because of pride. Jesus encourages the disciples not to focus on the outcomes that are entirely due to God, but to be grateful that they are saved by God's grace.

## Reflections

If Christ was the perfect teacher, then we must pay close attention and learn from His teaching methods. This week's Gospel lection reveals an important part of Jesus' disciple-making strategy and a critical teaching technique. The seventy-two (or seventy) disciples mentioned would have already spent much time experiencing Jesus' didactic teaching and no doubt learning from the twelve also. They would have already seen Him on numerous occasions interact with people along the way. In these interactions Jesus would have demonstrated and modeled what He expected His disciples to emulate. They would have already seen Him send out the twelve and heard reports of what happened once they returned. Now Jesus tells them they are ready to take the next step. Jesus gives them an assignment and empowers them to complete it. Jesus also gives them specific instructions on how to be successful while they are on assignment. When they return, Jesus again demonstrates great leadership and great coaching: He debriefs them and uses their experiences as another teaching opportunity. On this occasion he appears to caution against pride.

When looked at through the lens of teaching and learning, Jesus is relentless on the idea of multiplication. First, He has the twelve that He selected after much prayer. These are the disciples He selected to pour Himself into. Yet within this group there is the inner circle of Peter, James, and John who He selected for further attention. In this Gospel lection we read how Jesus was also focused on building discipleship beyond the twelve and personally involved Himself in the next seventy-two. While Scripture reveals Jesus used all sorts of teaching techniques (examples include reading Scripture, demonstrations, listening and questioning, illustrations, rhetorical questions, discourses, contrasts, parables and explanations, analogies, modeling, rebuking, dialogue and visual aids), sending out the disciples on an "action learning assignment" was an effective way for them to demonstrate and apply what they had learned independently in a real-life setting with built in accountability and further peer learning.

We are blessed today to have so many effective learning resources available to support Christian education. Some of the most common are Sunday school and small group study. While such provide valuable learning opportunities, these methodologies alone are not sufficient to make disciples who make disciples. We need to go beyond the leader's guide to facilitate lessons and have leaders guide the application of such lessons in the field. Discipleship transcends the classroom.

Jesus' methodology of making and multiplying disciples seemed a bit precarious right after His death on the cross. However, it did not take long for this small group of disciples that Jesus had poured Himself into to work with the Holy Spirit and embark on a process that would take the church to the literal ends of the earth during the last two millennia. The methodology Jesus taught has worked effectively from generation to generation. Now it's our turn.

