

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**  
**July 3, 2022**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Clarksburg, WV**

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**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. (Luke 10:1 N.R.S.V.)*

## **Disciples vs. Apostles**

The first thing you learn in the military is to never volunteer for anything. Right? One Sargent told his men that they were going to be helping to build a road that day. Everybody groaned because that sounded like a lot of hard work. Then the Sargent asked, “Who here knows how to drive a truck?” That sounded like a much easier assignment and so several hands went up. “Great,” said the Sargent, “Today you will be driving wheelbarrows.”

Another Sargent asked his men if any of them knew shorthand. Again that sounded like an easy assignment so hands went up. “Excellent,” said the Sargent. “They are shorthanded in the mess hall. You have just volunteered to help them.”

In our text for today, Jesus is looking for volunteers to be apostles, to go in front of him and prepare people for his coming. Now the text says that Jesus appointed 72 people for this task. In the military if you are appointed to do something, you have no choice. But that is not the case with Jesus. Jesus never forces us to do something against our will. We all have a choice. Our choice is to follow Jesus or not to follow him.

So Jesus is looking for volunteers. Let me stop there for a moment and ask you to raise your hand if you have ever volunteered for anything. Perhaps to help sell girl scout cookies, cook a meal for someone, run an errand, sing in the choir, be an usher, serve on a committee. Hold up your hand if you have ever volunteered to help in any way. That is just about everybody.

That is good news. No church can long exist without a core group of dedicated volunteers. No ministry can be effective without volunteers. No mission can be carried out without volunteers. So let me take a moment to thank all of you who have volunteered. You are crucial to God’s work in the world.

Looking back at our text, we see that the disciples have reached a critical point in their time with Jesus. Up until now, they have been disciples, students. Now they are being sent forth as ambassadors. That is what the world apostle means, one who is sent.

Apostles are those who are sent forth to be the Lord's representatives in the world. Jesus sends them out to pray, to heal, and to proclaim the kingdom of heaven.

So here is the thing. Many Christians get stuck at the disciple level and never move on to the apostle level. Being a disciple, a student requires humility, dedication, and hard work. But it does not require power from above. You can come to church for years and still doubt the power of the Holy Spirit. But you can't go forth to do ministry without the help of the Holy Spirit.

When I was in seminary, I couldn't wait to get out and be a pastor. I was tired of paying tuition. I was tired of paying for the privilege of having other people make me work. But here's the thing I discovered when we got to our first churches. I was very good at being a student. I knew how to be a good student. And I knew when I was doing a good job as a student, because my work was graded by the professors. I knew how to be a good student. I didn't know the first thing about how to be a good pastor.

Preaching was intimidating. How was I supposed to speak for God? What if I misled someone by accident? What was the secret to recruiting volunteers? How could I help the church reach new people? What was the best way to support and help the committees of the church do their work? And perhaps, most difficult of all, how did I know if I was doing it right? How do you measure such things as helping the church to grow spiritually?

Membership growth is not the same as faithfulness. How do you measure faithfulness?

It was a scary time for Charla and me. We discovered very quickly that we needed the help of God's Holy Spirit. We also needed the help of more experienced pastors and spiritually wise church members. Fortunately we did receive that help.

I still remember when we first moved into the manse at Covington. We felt like impostures. For the first few weeks we kept expecting the real pastors of the church to show up and ask us what we were doing.

Of course, not every church member becomes a pastor. Yet, every church member is to be a minister. The work of the church is the work of all of us. And the work of the church doesn't just happen within these four walls. The church is to be at work in the world around us.

I was going to ask if you were ready to move beyond sitting here as a student and move out into the world as an ambassador for Christ. I was going to ask that, but I was afraid of starting a mad dash for the doors. So, please wait until after the closing hymn and benediction.

So, if you are ready for the next step. If you are ready to be an apostle, an ambassador for the Lord, how do you start?

The first thing Jesus tells his newly appointed apostles is that they should pray to the Lord for laborers to be sent out into the harvest. For the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

The Greek word that is translated as pray or ask in English might also be translated as beg. It is the same word that is used in Luke 5 by the man covered in leprosy who falls on his face before Jesus and begs to be healed. It is the same word that is used by the father of the sick son who begs Jesus to heal his boy in Luke 9. There is an earnest desperation about the praying or asking.

Part of our motivation for going into the world as apostles is the understanding in our heart of hearts that the need is so great and so important.

Jesus knows, of course, that those who pray earnestly for laborers in the harvest will be more open to being those very laborers they are praying to be sent. Earlier this week a young man came to the church office and asked if I could help him get his ID card updated with his current address. He needed that in order for another organization to pay his rent. They were insisting that he have not only his lease but also another form of ID with the address on it. He explained that all of his utilities were paid with the rent, so he did not have a second ID with his current address on it.

I said, no, we are not set up to help with that. He accepted that and then asked if I would pray for him because he didn't know what else to do. It occurred to me that this might be a bit of manipulation on his part, hoping that if I prayed with him, I might change my mind. It also occurred to me that if I prayed with him, God might change my mind. Either way, I was okay with that.

So I prayed with him, and as I did, it occurred to me that the big problem was that he didn't know how much this would cost and that I was not willing to give him cash. But if the D.V. would accept the church credit card, it would be doable. Maybe that was God changing my mind. Anyway I asked him to go talk to the D.V. and ask them if they would accept the church's card. He came back and said, yes, they would. So I helped him. It took about a ~ hour of my time, but I felt that it was time well invested.

So, sometimes praying for God to send someone to do important work, means you get to do it yourself. There is a certain danger in prayer that way. Nevertheless, Jesus says pray, ask, beg the Lord to send laborers into the harvest!

So the first thing about being an apostle is to pray, both for power and for motivation. The second thing Jesus says is to offer peace and heal the sick. He gives some instructions about staying at the first place that is offered. In those days a traveling apostle would need to rely on the hospitality of someone in the town. Inns were rare and expensive. So Jesus says, don't go shopping for the best accommodations or the best food. Accept the first offer and get on with the ministry.

Jesus says let your peace rest on the house. The concept of peace here is one of wholeness and well being. Jesus doesn't mean that apostles are to avoid saying anything controversial. Sometimes the words of the gospel can be offensive and call people to change their ways. What Jesus means by peace is for his apostles to be working for the well being and wholeness of those we come into contact with. Staying in sin, is never a healthy or good place for people to be.

Jesus also says at the end of this passage that apostles are not to become proud of the power and authority that is granted them through the Holy Spirit. Our work is not about exercising power for the sake of proving we are better than others. It is about being faithful. Jesus says, “do not rejoice . . . that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

It is always good to remember what we are about. We are about serving Christ and living in the kingdom.

That brings me to the third thing, pray for laborers, bring peace, and announce the kingdom. In the Lord’s prayer, we pray that “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” So wherever the word of God is perfectly obeyed, there is the kingdom of heaven.

So we are to announce the coming of the kingdom, and that is indeed good news. Living by God’s will is not a burdensome restriction. It is a relief and a joy.

One more thing I want to add. You will notice that Jesus says that if a town does not receive you, shake off the dust from your sandals and let your peace return to you.

Some might read this as a curse against the towns and people that reject your ministry. But that hardly seems in keeping with the rest of Jesus’ teaching. A better reading is to see this as a reminder that we cannot nor should we try to force people to believe in Christ. Shaking off the dust has a sorrow to it, true, “I leave you as I found you.”

Shaking off the dust is also a reminder to us that we need not take our failures with us to the next town or person. When people reject the good news of the gospel, we can feel personally rejected. We can start to doubt our own calling and our own abilities. Jesus says, “Let that go.” Not everyone will respond positively to your work and words. Let that be on them, not you. Your job is not to be successful, your job is to be faithful.

So if you are faithful and are still rejected. Leave that failure behind and don’t drag it with you into the next encounter. Concentrate on being faithful and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

Amen.