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Christ Church, Sparta

The Rev. George Greer 2025-07-06

Several years ago, in the small community of Halifax, Nova Scotia, a group of local ministers hosted a big, open air crusade. Their guest speaker, a well known “big gun” in the world of evangelism, was to speak the last two nights; the speaker of course, was the late Dr. Billy Graham. Dr. Graham decided to travel unannounced a day early in order to see the city and attend the prayer service. That evening, as he sat out on the lawn, he noticed an older gentleman in front of him who seemed to be paying close attention to the speaker.

I do not know if you have ever been to a tent meeting, but towards the end of the evening, there is time set aside for people to come forward to make a commitment to the Christ. When the invitation was made, the older gentleman didn't move. Dr. Graham tapped him on the shoulder and offered to walk with him to the front if he wanted to accept Christ. The man turned around and shook his head and said, “Naw, I think I'll just wait until tomorrow night when the big gun shows up.”

Unfortunately for this man and I believe for far too many of us, winning souls for Christ is something reserved for the big guns alone. Our gospel today however would suggest that mission is for everyone, big guns and little shots alike.

Unlike St Matthew and St. Mark, St. Luke includes two stories of Jesus sending his followers out into the mission field. The first is found in Chapter 9 and is more like the account written in the other gospels, in that Jesus sends out the twelve. Today however, we hear about the sending of the 70. Most scholars believe that St. Luke included this story to emphasize the universal scope of the Good News.

He tells them that there is an abundant harvest, but not enough laborers. More are needed if the ripeness of the Kingdom is to be taken advantage of.

According to St. Matthew, the mission of the twelve is limited to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. Our lesson today has no such limitation. According to Jewish tradition, there are twelve tribes in the nation of Israel, and there are seventy nations in the entire world.

Most commentaries would suggest that the telling of this story symbolizes the message of Christ spreading through the world.

What I would like for us to consider doing today is to view this story from a completely different perspective. I invite you to consider this story not from the perspective of what it is to receive the message of Christ but from the perspective of what it means to bear the message of Christ; in other words, from the perspective of the missionary.

According to Christian tradition, the sending of the twelve represents the sending of those in ordained ministry. The sending of the 70 represents the commissioning of laity. By including both accounts, St. Luke is saying that evangelism is not reserved for the big guns only, but for all of us, rather we are ordained or not.

Like so many of the saints who have gone before us, you and I may feel as though we are not holy enough, smart enough; we may feel as though we were not blessed with the gift of speech, but then we should take heart, for we're in pretty good company.

The seventy in Luke's Gospel are never mentioned by name, there is no hint that they are especially gifted, trained, noble, or moral for that matter. There is no indication that they were great communicators. St. Luke doesn't refer to them as the "seventy best", he simply says, "the seventy others".

All of us are called to spread the gospel because "The harvest is plentiful; the laborers are few." This is as true today as it was in the first century. Yet many of us have no idea what we can do to help fulfill the ongoing mission of Christ. Our gospel passage today would suggest that our role is twofold: "Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest", in other words, prayer and secondly, "Go on your way. See, I am sending you." i.e. your active involvement. It is not a matter of doing one or the other.

By virtue of our baptism, we are called on to participate in the spreading of the gospel through prayer and action. Pray as if all depends upon God; act as if everything depends on your contribution.

We may wonder why God needs us or wants us to labor in the world. We may consider that the harvest is far too complex for us in view of the daily reports of crime, famine, poverty, homelessness, broken homes. We may doubt our qualifications to labor.

But as the Gospel lesson for us today indicates, the Lord needs us. The Lord calls us to participate in the gathering of God's creation; to actively spread God's word of love, forgiveness, and compassion. In a world of social and personal crises the Lord invites us to ask: How can I help? Where can I serve?

We will not be alone in our labor, for we have one another for support and encouragement; and we have the Lord who will guide us into the harvest. The only qualification for our task is belief in Christ.

The harvest is plentiful, so the Christian is never idle. There are always people to embrace and lift up in the name of Christ. What a privilege it is to be called on and to be a part of God's work. Amen.