

Sermon by Rev. Michael J. Hoyt  
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
July 8, 2001

**“See, I Am Sending You Out”**  
**Luke 10:1-11, 16-20**

You may have caught the July 4<sup>th</sup> comics page in the Post-Gazette.  
In the Classic Peanuts comic strip, Charlie Brown is sitting on a grassy hillside,  
in the dark, in one of his typically ponderous moods.

He thinks to himself,

*I must be out of my mind...*

*Here it is, the Fourth of July, and I'm sitting in the dark all by myself  
waiting for the sun to come up*

*Life sure is strange...and they say we only come this way once...*

*What did I come this way for?*

Sometimes I think the church of Jesus Christ wonders just that.

What did we come this way for?

Why are we spending our lives following this Jesus fellow.

I wouldn't be surprised if Jesus' followers in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke  
were asking just that.

What did we come this way for? Why are we following this guy?

Especially after Jesus turns away three perfectly able-bodied,  
potential church members

who don't quite meet up to his standards.

One who wants to follow, but expects to have a place to sleep at night.

One who wants to follow, but wants to attend his father's funeral first.

One who wants to follow, if he could just go and say farewell to his family.

Jesus wouldn't take any of them!

*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God,* he says

If Jesus' disciples heard these exchanges, they may indeed have been wondering  
why they chose to come this way with Jesus.

I know a few members of churches who have wondered the same.

Perhaps in the midst of a long search for a new pastor,

or in the heat of a church conflict,

or in the struggle to make limited resources meet unlimited needs,

and all of this to follow a guy who claims to be on to something

that is more important than even our families

or having roof over our heads at night.

Why have we come this way?

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If Jesus' followers are wondering about their decision,

they don't have much time to ponder  
before Jesus calls them over and begins to give instructions.  
He appoints seventy people and sends them ahead of him  
to every town and every place where he himself intends to go.

70 people – the same number of elders Moses chose to be his helpers.  
And in Genesis 10,  
70 is the number of the nations. It represents all the peoples of the world,  
all the descendants of Noah who spread out across the earth.  
Jesus sending out 70 people to all the towns and villages where he intends to go  
is a sign that his message and his mission are not just for Israel.  
Jesus' gospel is universal – for every nation, every people, every person –  
no one on earth is to be excluded from hearing the good news.

This, however, does not mean, apparently,  
that everyone who hears the good news will have the resolve to follow Jesus.  
We've just seen three who did not.

Given those “would-be followers” that Jesus has just turned away,  
we might ask...

Who were these 70 people Jesus chose?  
How did Jesus choose them? What was special about them?  
How many were men? How many women?  
Were they young or old?  
Did any of them express any hesitation at being asked  
to go ahead of Jesus?  
Or do they really know what they're getting into?  
Have they heard the things Jesus has been saying  
about how he is going to die?

But these questions remain unanswered, and the story moves quickly on.

Jesus gives instructions –  
specific instruction that sound more than a little strange to us.  
First, they are to pray for more laborers besides themselves  
because, apparently, the task is bigger than they can possibly accomplish.  
Second, Jesus warns them of the danger they will face,  
*See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.*  
Thirdly, they are to take nothing with them,  
nor engage in conversation with anyone until they get to their appointed town.  
No time even for a friendly greeting until their work is done.  
Finally, they are to depend on the generosity of the people to whom they go.  
No car, no checkbook, no Visa or Mastercard –  
not even a granola bar and a bottle of water in a backpack.  
This is an exercise in trust. Something else will sustain them,  
something else will power them.  
Something other than the resources on which  
they are accustomed to depend.

They go with a message of Peace on their lips.  
But their mission not only one of words,

it is a mission of deeds as well.  
They go in the name of Jesus to cure the sick,  
all the while making this rather puzzling claim that  
*The kingdom of God has come near to you.*  
And if the people who hear their message do not receive them,  
or do not share their peace, or do not welcome them with open arms  
it's no skin off the disciples nose,  
just a little dust off their feet.  
The disciples are not to be worried about popularity, about being liked.  
If the people do not like them, do not accept them,  
they are to move on,  
And as they leave, they are to make it clear that  
whether the people of the town accept it or not,  
*the kingdom of God has come near.*  
The world is now a different place because of Jesus.  
The situation has changed, and everyone has a decision to make.

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The church in North American today has a decision to make,  
because we are struggling from a loss of our mission.

Jesus has sent us out as lambs into the midst of wolves,  
but too often in the past we've decided  
we'd rather try to look as much like the wolves as possible.  
Blending in is much less dangerous.

As a result of all our blending in,  
we find ourselves sitting on a hillside with Charlie Brown,  
in the dark waiting for the sun to come up  
asking, "What did we come this way for?"  
Why are we following Jesus anyway?  
He doesn't help us blend in very much, but makes us stand out.  
Even in Pittsburgh, one of the shrinking number of cities  
where you can still score social points  
by going to church.

But we don't relate very well to these 70 disciples  
who were called by Jesus and sent out on a mission.

At least we still baptize children and adults  
into the One, Holy, Universal, and Apostolic Church  
(a strange practice if you really think about it).

But most would be hard-pressed to say what it means to be an  
Apostolic church – how are we Apostolic?

The Apostles are, literally, the "Sent-Out-Ones"  
We are the Sent-Out-Ones,  
Sent out to announce the Reign of God in all the world  
Sent out to invite people into the kingdom of God  
Sent out to share God's peace in a world of violence.  
Sent out to announce a vision of God's future  
in which Satan falls from heaven like a flash of lightning

and the people of God go out in Jesus' name  
and are victorious over the power of evil  
over everything that would disrupt God's peace  
over everything that would cast the shadow of death  
over God's world.

Jesus has said to us, "See, I am sending you out,"  
but we have too easily settled for a lesser vision of the church.  
Rather than being the gathering of Sent-Out-Ones  
whom God has mobilized as a missional force in the world...

...the church has become merely a place.  
The church has become a place where certain things happen.  
Just the way we talk about our churches reveals this compromise.  
We ask "Where do you *go* to church?"  
when we should be asking  
"Where is your church *going*?"  
We ask "Did you go to church last Sunday"  
when we should be asking  
"Where is God *sending* your church this week?"

If our baptism means anything,  
it means that we are ones who have been claimed by God  
claimed for salvation, yes,  
and therefore also claimed for God's mission, for God's kingdom,  
claimed and sent as a community which bears witness to  
the good news of Jesus Christ,  
our crucified, risen, and victorious Lord.

Glenshaw Presbyterian Church is a church that hears Jesus' call.  
There are many ways that we, as a congregation, are going where Jesus sends  
to carry out his mission.  
We have missionary members who have just gone to West Virginia.  
We have missionary members who have gone and still go  
to other parts of the globe  
to bear witness to God's kingdom.  
We have people in this congregation who are missionaries to each other,  
bearers of the God's peace and healing  
to those among us who are suffering, struggling.

Still, I wonder, are we living up to our baptismal calling?  
What does it mean for us to be a missionary people right here in Glenshaw,  
here in the North Hills.  
I wonder what it means for us to be a missionary people  
who are sitting here on the grassy hillside  
overlooking a city like Pittsburgh.  
"What have we come this way for?"  
"What has Jesus called us this way for?"  
I wonder.

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Jesus receives the 70 as they return to him from their missionary journey.  
They return with joy, telling stories of success like nothing you've every heard.  
Even the demons submit to them when they go in Jesus' name.

But Jesus warns them about their success.  
Do not rejoice in your success. Do not rejoice in the exercise of power.  
The success of the church, and the nature of the church's power  
will be totally redefined as it follows Jesus to the cross.  
There, at the cross, the church will ask most intensely  
"What did we come this way for?"  
But if we linger there long enough with Jesus,  
we will begin to recognize that this slaughtered lamb  
in the midst of wolves  
is the One who brings God's eternal victory.

And when we are startled by the reality  
that this One we've been following,  
this One who was crucified,  
has been raised from the dead  
then we will have our reason for rejoicing.

For we who name the name of Jesus, and live by its power  
a power mysteriously revealed in the weakness and vulnerability  
of a lamb amidst wolves,  
we who name the name of Jesus  
can know that our names are written in heaven  
and will be held forever  
in the gracious, sovereign, healing hands of God.