

July 7, 2019

Luke 10: 1-11

Rev. Larry Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

“Peace Offered and Shared”

We, who are the church, that is Christ-followers in the world, are not called to be self-centered. When we say “yes” to Jesus we place God at the center and while it is easy to say it is not so easy to do. There are many options on Sunday morning that call us to be elsewhere other than in worship. There is the temptation on Sunday mornings to pull the pillow over our heads and catch a little more sleep. I don’t know if you fought that battle this morning but chances are you’ve experienced it more than a time or two. Years ago, I came across an interesting critique of the church. The author said, “Christianity in our day is like a great football game in which there are 22 players on the field in desperate need of rest and 100,000 thousand people in the stands in desperate need of exercise.” Christianity invites our participation. Faith is not a “pull-the-pillow-over-our-head” way of life. Even so, the options make it tough. If it’s not the way our beds beckon to us on Sunday morning it’s the temptation to sit back and watch others do the church thing. Sunday morning can be a good time to be at the lake or the park or enjoying a cup of coffee on the deck. We face the hard truth today. Our culture is much less about going to worship on Sundays and more about getting to the brunch place or to the stores early enough to beat the crowd. And so, we have options and that’s why I say it is no small matter that we are here today. We desire a life with God and we can be honest about the challenge that comes with seeking a God-centered life.

I’ve started the sermon in the center because this is where the key struggle of faith takes place. The battle is waged in our core, this pull between a self-centered life and a God-centered one. Among the great witnesses of the Christian faith in the past century was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose own life was martyred by the Nazis in the period of WWII. Bonhoeffer’s career as a theologian called him to serve as a faculty member of Union Theological Seminary in New York. After a brief time, Bonhoeffer decided that was the wrong path for him and he returned to Germany to continue his protest against Hitler and the regime’s persecution of Jews. Ultimately, this led to Bonhoeffer’s execution, just weeks before the end of the war and the collapse of the Nazi government. Bonhoeffer’s classic writing entitled, The Cost of Discipleship, reminds us that following Jesus is not about an offer we make to God but always a response to what God offers us. Unlike Bonhoeffer, our physical lives are not on the line but we do experience the spiritual tension of who we will serve and how our commitment will be lived out. This is why we’ve begun today recognizing the depth and weight to what our faith demands from us. We are not a self-centered community. We are a Kingdom of God community, and every day we prepare ourselves to live more consistently into that call.

The attention we give to Luke’s 10th chapter points to a shift in the mission of Jesus. Up to this point, Jesus’ efforts have focused on The Twelve. He has revealed who he is to them. He has shared his healing power and, through teaching, encouraged them to experience the fullness of God. In the first half of Luke’s gospel, Jesus demonstrates the way of love, grace and peace. In effect, what Jesus does is educate The Twelve about the nature of his mission. Now, in the 10th chapter, Christ’s mission becomes a commission. That word means “being with” Jesus in mission. Jesus commissions others and, as we’ve heard, he calls not just The Twelve but 70 others to share in his work. They are sent to carry the peace of God into the world. It will not be easy. There will be a cost for some. There will be no guarantees, but the time is right for Jesus to enlist a whole community to be with him in mission to the world.

Our family enjoyed some vacation time last week at Lakeside, Ohio, on the shore of Lake Erie. Over the years we’ve enjoyed many such weeks at Lakeside and being there reminded me of past family experiences. I recalled a sailboat experience from years ago that involved my brother-in-law, Mark, and me. Let me be quick to say that I’m not a sailor and neither is Mark, but we thought it would be fun to rent a small sailboat for an hour or two. When it’s a beautiful day and you watch sailors on the water catching the breeze, it looks so peaceful and relaxing. The perception of it doesn’t quite match the reality. First we had to choose a boat. The smallest sailboat is called a Sunfish. It has just one little sail and the boat is not much bigger than a two-person board. We decided it would be much more rewarding and adventurous to take out the slightly bigger boat. It had a second sail, the jib sail, I learned it was called. Two sails and two of us. It sounded perfect. Choosing the boat was the easy part. More challenging was learning that before we could put the boat in the water we had to receive some training. With the boat pulled slightly up on shore, an instructor went over the basic techniques of maneuvering the sails, along with safety tips to insure we would return to the shore in one piece. “This isn’t so bad,” we thought. After getting our certification and all the equipment squared away, we set sail. As I said, watching others on the water, catching the wind and slicing through the waves doesn’t quite match the reality of doing it yourself. We floundered. We yelled advice to one another on how to take a tact or position the sails. The waves and the wind were both stronger than we had expected,

and our vision of sailing the waters in a relaxing and expert way ended with the boat falling onto its side and dumping us into the lake. Thankful for the life-vests we wore, we bobbed along, struggling to set the boat aright. There's nothing relaxing about trying to get a sailboat right-side-up on a windy day. Well, I'm standing here this morning as evidence that we made it back to shore. The point is, thinking about or imagining doing something is nothing like actually doing it. We had no idea what we were taking on.

To Jesus' credit, when he sends the 70 out he wants them to know exactly what to expect. I suppose you could say there is nothing more frustrating than floundering for Jesus in the world. Jesus sets the 70 up for success because he tells them the very things he has experienced they will experience. Not everyone will be open to the message of God. Some will be closed off and ridicule them, but Jesus assures those who go into the world that they have everything they need. It's odd to say they had everything they needed. Jesus said, take no purse and no bag and no sandals; they were going to be vulnerable and exposed, like lambs in the midst of wolves. How could they have what they needed to succeed? They went with the peace of God. The peace of God was with them, and even when that peace was rejected by others it remained with them. They would never be without it and it would sustain them even when the day was harsh or hard. Like the life vests that kept by brother-in-law and me from sinking too far down, God's peace never fails us. And then, Jesus told his partners in the mission, that they carried a message that was true in all places and for all people. The message was the same message Jesus had brought to the world, "The kingdom of God is at hand." For those who accepted it, it was true. And for those who rejected it, it was still true. God's kingdom, what we call the Reality of God, is certain because of Christ.

To desire a God-centered life is to continue our participation in Christ's mission. We're given what we need, God's peace, and the message is simple and true, God's reality is now. We gather as the church on Sunday mornings not because it is our calling but because it prepares us to live into our calling. We are called to go into the world holding peace and sharing it. This week let's practice this. Each day this week find at least one opportunity to re-state the message of the mission. The 70 were to say, "Peace be with this house." How would you say that in your own words. Maybe the message will sound something like this, "What a good feeling to be content with what we have." Or, "Everything is as we need it to be." How can you share God's peace so that it makes sense a difference in your life? The 70 were to say, "The kingdom of God has come near." What are the words you can use to share that message? Maybe it will be like this, "I can see God's love in your life right now." Or, "It may not seem like it, but God is working through all of this." Take on the challenge this week. Work at it. Remember, for those who are receptive and for those who are not God's peace and God's presence are there.

This is not "mission impossible." We are given what we need. The only thing better than having God at our center is living a life that shares God's love and peace. Have a faithful and effective week with God at the center of your life.