

+ In Nomine Jesu +

Luke 10:1-20

Date: July 6, 2025

Liturgical Date: Pentecost 4 (Proper 9C)

Title: The kingdom of God has come near

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

In Psalm 19, David sings, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” Creation is beautiful. The sun, the stars, the sky - all glorious. And we can behold what God has made to know something about God. But creation is not enough to know all about God. To know about God’s salvation, more than observing creation is necessary. The Lord sends out 72 with the most urgent message - “The kingdom of God has drawn near” so that all would know God’s salvation.

The Lord sends 72 ahead of him, where he himself is about to go. Jesus has set his face towards Jerusalem, where he will bring peace by his death on the cross. Where the Lord goes, so also go the ones that he sends. The Lord goes to make peace, so he sends men to speak the message of peace. And even as those men speak peace, they bear also those marks that make for peace, as St. Paul bears in his body the marks of Jesus.

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. The harvest is prepared and ready. The Lord of the harvest has taken the care to plan this harvest. The Lord Jesus knows who are his, whom he has called, who will be gathered into the eternal barns. And many will be brought in, not just a few here or there, but a plentiful harvest from all over the world. The people that Jesus will draw in as a harvest is so great that the laborers to tend to that harvest are few.

The Lord of the harvest tends to the harvest - those whom he calls. So the Lord of the harvest sends out the laborers. And regarding these laborers, the Lord only commands us to pray. Will there be enough laborers for the harvest? Pray that the Lord sends them. Shall we worry or fret about not enough laborers? No, certainly not, for the Lord does not command us to worry, but to pray. The harvest belongs to the Lord, so he certainly will send out - throw out - workers into the harvest. All of those whom the Lord desires to save will be brought in.

For the workers who are thrown out into the harvest - what a calling! How exciting to be sent by the Lord with a message of peace. But no one should be naive. Being sent out by Jesus is dangerous business. If they crucified and killed the one who sends, what will happen to those who are sent? They are sent as lambs in the midst of wolves. Wolves harass the lambs, tear them to shreds, and devour the lambs. In the same way, those who are sent will experience danger and even know fear and loss. The devil will enrage people who are full of anger and hate to make life difficult for those who preach and teach the word. The Lord’s words here warn us so that we would not be surprised to see God’s word opposed and the preachers of the word in danger. Certainly the devil opposes the word wherever it is taught, whether in our churches, our homes, or our schools.

Those who are sent are not to bring along extras, for whatever is needed would be provided. Those who are sent are to bring the essential message, the word that they were sent to deliver. "Peace be to this house!" Whatever was the state of this house before - hostility or fear or anger or despair - now peace has come to this house, from the one who makes peace by his cross.

Some will receive this word of peace. They realize that on their own, they have no peace with God. They know their own sins, what weighs them down. They confess that God rightly ought to condemn them, that God's wrath is upon them. Their consciences cry out to God for mercy, that he would spare them, that he would cover them with blood. They hear this message of peace and consider what a gracious message that this is, and how gracious is the one who sends out this message. Let us be as sons of peace.

The sons of peace receive the messenger and even provide for him. Those who are sent did not take moneybags or knapsacks or sandals. But now they lack nothing. The house where the messengers stay - the house with sons of peace - puts in front of them what they need - food, shelter, whatever is needed to sustain this life is given to those who are sent.

Indeed, the laborer deserves his wages. The Lord provides for those whom he sends through the hands of those who hear. St. Paul writes that this is still valid for the church and her pastors - "Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches." Or, "The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."

The worker has his needs provided for so that he can spend his days and nights and his energy devoted to the ministry of the word and to prayer. The pastor tends to the congregation with preaching and the care of souls. Such a duty is a high calling. The congregation provides for the pastor based on the dominical command and to show appreciation to the Lord who sent the pastor to care for the congregation.

The Lord sends out his messengers as an expeditionary force into enemy territory. There, they find those who are sick and those who are dying. The expeditionary force finds that the enemy has a fortified stronghold. And the enemy deals in sickness and death. The messengers invade the enemy's territory with signs - healing the sick - a glimpse that the enemy's stronghold on the people is about to be broken. Sickness and death will no longer win the day. The king sends his messengers to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

"The kingdom of God has come near to you." The expeditionary force announces the arrival of the king - the true king. We are here to rescue you from sin and death. The king is coming and he even is here through this word which frees you from the enemy. No longer does sin torment your conscience - you are forgiven. No longer does death have a say - you are alive in Christ the king. The enemy is overthrown, even as we speak.

But this message from the king is not always received. For whatever reason, the message is not heeded nor taken to heart. The town does not celebrate the king who comes to save them.

Each town may have its own reason not to receive the message, "Peace be to this house."

For some, the requirements of the kingdom may be a little too strict or too absolute. Others may enjoy living in the way of the enemy - self indulgence, feeding the belly. They don't want to give up the freedom that they think they have under enemy rule. On the other hand, some do not see the gospel as good news. Perhaps the gift is a little too free. The grace is too abundant for their liking. Some in the town want to make peace on their own. Others become frustrated that even though many hear the message of peace, they still live like they lived under the enemy. In any case, there will be places that do not receive the messengers of peace.

Our modern temptation might be to blame the messenger when he is rejected. Maybe he wasn't as winsome as he ought to have been or there's something else wrong with him. But Jesus doesn't blame the messengers for any of the towns' responses. The messengers did what they were sent to do. The word still stands no matter what the response, "The kingdom of God has come near." Rather, the stern warnings fall upon those who hear the message and do not receive it. The Lord knows when his messengers are rejected. The towns that do not receive the message are stuck with both the dust from the messengers' feet and the kingdom of God that has still drawn near to them.

The Lord had sent messengers to Sodom, way back in the day, at the time of Abraham. Abraham's nephew Lot settled in land around Sodom. Sodom was notorious for their wickedness. Their wickedness was so great that Abraham pleaded for the Lord to spare Sodom for the sake - finally - of 10 men. Yet 10 men were not found. The Lord sent messengers to Sodom. Lot welcomed the messengers and fed them and gave them rest. But the men of Sodom wanted their way with the messengers. The messengers announced that Sodom would be destroyed, with Lot and his family being the only ones to escape by the Lord's mercy. And the Lord destroyed Sodom, its land being made like the smoke from a furnace.

That will be preferable to rejecting the message of peace. The judgment comes from the one who sends out the messengers. No mercy will be shown to those who reject the word of peace. The Lord does not mess around when he sends out his messengers. The kingdom of God has come near to you. The message is with royal and divine authority, so rejection comes with royal and divine wrath.

However the messengers are treated, so the one who sent them is treated. 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 Lord Jesus sends messengers - pastors - to you so that what you hear from them is as hearing from Jesus himself. Jesus attaches his royal and divine authority to the word that comes to you through the pastor. The word of admonition and repentance comes from the pastor as from the Lord. The word of blessing and promise comes from the pastor as from the Lord.

The kingdom of God has come near to you. Forgiveness of sins is for you. Your sins are many, but turn from them and find forgiveness in Jesus and his blood. Jesus' blood covers all of your sins, so that when God sees you, he sees Jesus' blood covering you. Therefore, you will be exalted to heaven. For you no longer belong to sin or death or the devil, but you belong to your

Lord Jesus Christ, who purchased you with his own blood. When you hear all of that good news, that's not just the pastor telling you that. Jesus is the one telling you that.

Even at your most troubled time, when you long for peace, as the miseries of this life pile up, as death draws near, pastor gives words of comfort. Go in peace. May God the Father, who created you, may God the Son, who redeemed and saved you with His blood, may God the Holy Spirit, who sanctified you in the water of Holy Baptism, receive you into the company of saints and angels to await the resurrection and live in the light of his glory forevermore. Those are more than peaceful words from the pastor. They are spoken as Christ himself would speak them, for indeed Christ promises, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

But the warning stands on those who reject the word. Pastor, you can't tell me what to do. Pastor, lighten up, everybody is doing it, after all, it's the 21st century. And those are the conversations where people are trying to be nice. But when the pastor speaks the word of the Lord, and that word is rejected, whether by stubbornness or anger, the pastor isn't the only one being rejected. Christ himself is rejected. And even more, the one who sent Christ, the heavenly Father, is rejected. Christ knows when his messengers are rejected, and the damnation will be unbearable.

The messengers return with joy to Jesus. They find joy in the miraculous works that they had done while they were sent out. Such is the temptation in the pastoral office - to put the focus on seeming success on things done by us pastors. But Jesus brings his messengers back to the reality of the spiritual warfare all around. The war is real. The devil is powerful. But Jesus has defeated the enemy. Satan is cast down out of heaven. The devil tempted Jesus, yet Jesus did not fall into temptation. The kingdom of God advances and takes ground on Satan's kingdom through these messengers that Jesus sends out, even today, even as pastors preach the word, baptize the young and the old, and forgive sins.

In that task, Jesus sends his messengers with authority even over the enemy, so that nothing at all ever would hurt them. The messengers may be in danger - they are lambs in the midst of wolves. They may lose or have a miserable time in an earthly sense. But the outcome is never in doubt. Christ has defeated the devil. Christ has written the names of his messengers in heaven, even as Christ has recorded the names of all of the faithful from the Old Testament, the prophets, and then apostles, and all of the saints whom Christ has purchased with his blood.

The Lord sends out the 72 to preach peace to the people. Likewise, today the Lord of the harvest throws out more messengers - pastors - into his harvest - his people. The kingdom of God has come near.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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