



**Northeastern  
Ohio Synod**

God's work. Our hands.

NEOS Summer Sabbath Sermon Series

July 3, 2022

Lectionary 14, Year C

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**Luke 10:1-11, 16-20**

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

<sup>3</sup>Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup>Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup>Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ <sup>6</sup>And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup>Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.

<sup>8</sup>Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup>cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ <sup>10</sup>But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup>‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ ”

<sup>16</sup>“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

<sup>17</sup>The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!”

<sup>18</sup>He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. <sup>19</sup>See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. <sup>20</sup>Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Who thought that this reading from Luke 10 was a good idea during a sabbath time? I mean, think about it. The sabbath is supposed to be a time of rest, a time to reflect and ponder the way of the Lord. The sabbath, as Eugene Peterson once described it, is a day to pray and play. Pray and play.

But Luke 10? Not exactly praying and playing is it? According to our Sundays and Seasons resources here we find *Jesus commissioning harvesters and laborers to go where he would go and do what he would do. Risking hardship and danger in exchange for the experience of great joy, they offer peace and healing as signs that the kingdom of God is near.*

That might involve a lot of prayer. But play? Luke 10 is hard work! Luke 10 is about what we might do AFTER we have a sabbath rest, or BEFORE we take a breather. In fact, if you really want to see how tough this work is, read the whole chapter. Read Luke 9 as well, and probably Luke 11. This is not Sabbath material -- bah, humbug!

And yet.

And yet, I can't help but wonder if maybe, while the 70 were off working the harvest, did Jesus get a chance to rest? Did he take a Sabbath, maybe even a sabbatical while they were gone? We're not told what Jesus did while they were gone, but I wonder. I wonder if he did what many of us do when we find ourselves home alone. Maybe we dance like Tom Cruise did in "Risky Business." Or, maybe we plop down on the couch and "chill" as they say. Maybe we tackle a project that is as relaxing as it is work.

Maybe Jesus did things like that after he sent the 70 off to work. Maybe he took time to pray and play. We know that he often took off to pray on his own regardless of who was with him. Now, knowing that he soon would be travelling the same routes his disciples were on, perhaps Jesus rested.

It's been said that one cannot preach out of silence, and here there is just silence on what Jesus was or was not doing while the 70 were gone. So, let's turn back to these 70 and consider just what it was that they were doing. What sort of harvest were they facing?

In 1985 sociologists Robert Bellah and Richard Madsen in their book *Habits of the Heart* coined the word "sheilism". They quoted a young nurse, whom they called "Sheila," who said, *"I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's "Sheilism." Just my own little voice ... It's just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. And, you know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other."*

When that quote was shared with a group of pastors, it received the typical reaction pastors would give. To them it sounded rather egotistical and self-centered. As one person put it, *it's a rather do-it-yourself well-meaning mish-mash of religious views, often from strands of many religions. (Michael Rogness, workingpreacher.org)*

In other words, since it didn't sound very Christ-centered, pastors didn't see much good in it. But there was a minority view. One of the pastors observed, "What a humble person." Since he had grown up in a rather fundamentalist congregation, he heard it differently. He heard a person who was trying to be honest about her struggles with faith. Rather than judging her for being self-focused, he wanted to accept her for her struggles.

Isn't that the sort of attitude we'd like to encounter from those working for the Lord? The truth is, there are probably a lot more "Sheila's" out there. Women, and men, who aren't 100% sure what they believe, or who they believe, but they have faith. They know it has something to do with loving yourself, and loving others. They want to do the right thing, they might even be willing to join in a community of faith, but they haven't been convinced by what they have seen or experienced.

All around us are folks who may have had close ties with the Christian Church (or not), but at this point in their lives they certainly do not. They have a vague belief in God, and may well believe in Jesus as their Savior. They believe that you should love one another, and even help one another.

They might equate being religious with being part of an institution. The idea that the institution might also be a loving, caring community does not occur to them. Or, they've had a bad experience in the past and they equate being religious with being prejudice, judgmental, or worse. Or, as Sheila implied, they equate being part of the church as being considered a fanatic. This might be our field in which we are to harvest for the Lord.

While there may be some who are downright hostile towards the church, we are more likely to encounter people who are like Sheila. Or worse, they are just indifferent. They are people who think it just doesn't matter whether or not they are part of a community of believers.

People who feel they are too busy for the church, or that they don't need the church in order to be complete. This is a hard battle to fight, but not an impossible one.

Fortunately, the same sort of instructions that Jesus gave to his disciples still stand well for us today. Granted, we might need to tweak them for our modern setting, but they still are good advice.

For instance, Jesus sent them out in pairs, to places where he himself intended to go. Jesus wants us to know that none of us has to proclaim Christ's message alone, and that in the end, it is Christ himself who will complete the task. Even more, we are to be reminded that most of our ministry opportunities take place outside of the four church walls.

Here is the place we gather to praise God, to receive a time of sabbath, but when we leave we enter into the world of word and service -- of ministry. There are people who need the Lord and we are the ones who can share that good news.

In whatever ways we find ourselves proclaiming the good news, Jesus' call to go in pairs assures us that we can provide support to each other and help one another fill in the whole story of the kingdom of God. Just don't do what two missionaries did when they showed up at a Lutheran's house once. She told them she was a Lutheran and that she believed that she was saved by grace through faith. One missionary replied, "so do we," and his partner countered, "No, we don't." They weren't going to win any converts if they couldn't even agree on what they believed. So, just as Jesus taught his disciples before he sent them out, we want to be sure we know our faith. We want to know our message.

What is that message? Jesus told his disciples it was to declare that the kingdom of God has come near. And what is the Kingdom of God? It isn't so much a place, as a way of being. It is knowing that the presence of God is with us, and that Christ is at the center of our lives. To say "the Kingdom of God has come near" is to reveal the love of God to a world that is broken and in need.

Consider this story: Two children attend a Sunday School in a church near their home. Neither of their parents come, they just seem to arrive on their own. One day they confide to their teacher that their dad is in jail. Immediately, a member of the congregation goes to their house and talks with their mother. She asks the mother what they might be able to do for the family. She prays with her. And then she gives her a hug.

Later that day, the pastor stops by to reiterate the offer to help. In the course of their conversation, the mother tells him about the hug. She says, "That hug was exactly what I needed."

In some mysterious way which we cannot explain, in that moment, the mother experienced the nearness of the kingdom of God. She sensed the peace which passes understanding. When we love others as God loves us, we are declaring that the Kingdom of God has come near. Can you think of a time when you sensed the nearness of the Kingdom of God? Could you share it with a friend?

This invitation to Sabbath rest is not a time for no thought given regarding how we might labor in the harvest. Instead, it's a time to rest, reflect, and revive. All the 'Sheilas' out there are part of the harvest into which Jesus is sending us. Let us not be shy in answering the Lord of the harvest when he calls for laborers. And let us be ready to declare: The kingdom of God has come near, and is with us now. Amen