



SENT

**A 20 day devotional on Luke 10:1-24
by Classis Grand Rapids South**

Instructions:

Dwell on Luke 10:1-24 each day before reading
the daily devotional.

After This

Luke 10: 1

By Rev George Vink

A person doesn't have to be a former English teacher to know words are important. Pronouns and prepositions make a difference. As one of those highly-unappreciated mentors, I occasionally stumbled across a student's wrath when I asked them, "Where's the 'this' you're describing?" The pronoun "this" requires a direct reference. It's that simple. However, enough lament....

Luke, a divinely inspired writer, had such a reference when moving his account of Jesus' life from one event to another. He didn't use chapters and verse; they're added for our benefit. So, with the preposition, "after," followed by the pronoun "this," Luke is describing that the Lord was collecting an advanced team. Yet, it's worthwhile for us to ask, "To what is the 'this' referring?" Looking back in Luke 9, we read an account of someone's excuses for not following Jesus. It's a dramatic exchange between Jesus and unknown persons.

As they were walking along, Jesus and his disciples were approached by someone making the promise, "I will follow wherever you go." Sounds committed! The man did say, "wherever!" Words matter! Jesus let him know his future was not full of five-star hotels. Jesus said to another person, "follow me!" to which the person replied with a delay tactic, or even avoidance altogether. Jesus responded with an often-misunderstood, "Let the dead bury their own dead but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another excuse followed.

Jesus left little leeway, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Even having heard it previously, reading his words again makes us cringe. We wonder, "Are any of us fit for the service expected?"

The next four weeks we'll be looking at being sent. Luke 10 followed Jesus' warning words in Luke 9 with, "After this the Lord appointed...." We hear no excuses, no dodging about following. We're told there'll be dangers. We're called to go like "lambs among wolves," without funds and to eat "whatever they give you...." However, we go with Jesus' assuring words, "He who listens to you listens to me..."

What follows Luke's opening of "After this...." is a consequence of knowing our excuses can't cut it! Following Jesus still means being committed and obeying Jesus. Doing so will bring us joy. (Luke 10:17)

KEY THOUGHT

We offer to follow Jesus, but we need to know that he expects commitment.

PRAYER

Loving Father who gave Jesus to a world in need of redemption, help us to look at our lives and see the excuses we form so readily to avoid going where we need to go and doing what we need to do as we follow Jesus. Amen

Appointed

Luke 10: 1

By Jolene DeHeer

One of the definitions of the word “appointed,” is “to be chosen.” What a beautiful phrase! To be chosen gives one the feeling of acceptance, worth, and belonging. It instills confidence and purpose into our lives. Fifty years ago, David DeHeer chose me to be his wife. I still vividly remember the profound joy of being his chosen one. However, there is a choosing, an appointing, that is far greater than being chosen by another person. Our verse reminds us that it is the LORD who chooses and appoints people to join Him. We join Him in the work of restoration and transformation by sharing the good news of the gospel. Further examination of the word “appointed” reveals these synonyms: commissioned, designated, authorized, anointed, and consecrated. What an honor and privilege to be one of the appointed ones chosen by Christ!

This high and holy calling humbles us and can also intimidate us. However, the good news is that Christ does not appoint us and then abandon us. He sends us out in the power of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:10 reminds us, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” At the appointed time, God formed us in our mother’s womb and gave each of us unique personalities and talents. At the appointed time, He called us to salvation through Christ’s shed blood and sacrifice. At the appointed time, He uniquely qualified each of us for kingdom work. At the appointed time He now sends us out to do that work, (don’t miss this part!) which He already prepared for us to do. How exciting is that?!

This great good news frees us to be who we were appointed to be, and doing the work we were appointed to do. We need not rely on our own power, but instead we have complete dependence on His power at work in and through us. Let us go boldly, confidently, and joyfully into each new day as Christ’s appointed disciples.

KEY THOUGHT

You are appointed and sent by Christ. Ask Him every morning to put at least one person in your path that day who needs to experience God’s grace and ask Him to clearly show you how He wants to use you in that person’s life.

PRAYER

Lord, we humbly thank you for the blessing of being appointed by you. Thank you for giving our lives purpose and power. Thank you for the opportunity to be used by you to spread the good news of salvation through your blood. May your kingdom come, and your will be done through me. Amen.

Two By Two

Luke 10: 1

By Rev George Vink

Jesus frequently used farming images to illustrate his teaching. Using the plowing and looking back imagery, Jesus taught the disciples that following him requires commitment and working together. Plowing required team work, whether between the farmer and the ox or two oxen yoked together and the farmer. Being sent to proclaim the kingdom also requires team work.

Team work, being sent out two by two, mirrors God himself. John 1:2 tells us that the Word (Jesus) was with God in the beginning. Genesis 1:2 declares "...the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." The unity of Father, Son and Spirit is the relationship model for us to emulate. The Father instructs believers, saying "Hear him. He's my beloved." The Son declares he came to do his Father's will. All accomplished through the powerful work of the Spirit!

When Jesus sent out his followers, two by two, he was reflecting the importance of team work, the joy of working together in harmony. When two work together as led by the Spirit, their credibility is enhanced. They experience the needed mutual support. Luke's telling of the early church in Acts reveals its continuance, beginning in Antioch where Paul and Barnabas team up. Later in Acts 15, we learn that the Jerusalem Synod sent out Judas and Silas to confirm personally what was sent in writing regarding how to deal with troubling situations. Continuing, Luke wrote that upon a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, both head further with new partners, Mark goes with Barnabas and Silas accompanies Paul. Working as teams!

What we need to realize, as those teams did then, is that it's never really a team of just two.

The two can and do what they do only with a third person empowering them—The Holy Spirit. With the Spirit present, the relationships needed become real and dynamic. We must not and cannot be sent unless we are sent with one another and the Spirit. It's always team work. Whether Jesus "appoints" as we're told in Luke 10, or we're commissioned as told to "go" in Matthew 28, it's his presence, his spirit, that empowers the rewarding relationship of team work. It's a God thing!

KEY THOUGHT

Going out two by two is a way of reflecting the relationship embodied in the Trinity which is something to be reflected in our teaming with others to fulfill our being sent.

PRAYER

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, team with us as we go as sent to places yet unknown and to people yet unseen. May our relationship with you and one another be joy filled and empowering. Amen.

The Harvest is Plentiful, but the Workers are Few

Luke 10: 2

By Rev Arek O'Connell

Last summer I led a mission trip to Compton, California with over 20 high school students. When we landed, we quickly realized we had traveled into a heat wave. While we were there the daily temperature often exceeded 105 degrees. Additionally, this was one of the very few weeks that the LA area had excessive humidity accompanying the high heat. On average we worked outside eight to nine hours a day that week.

Luckily for us, we found our Oasis. One of the pastors at nearby church had a pool that he would let us jump into in between work projects. However, this was not a luxury this week, it was a necessity. Most of us looked forward to pool time more than any other part of the day because it offered relief that we yearned for. The one day that I suggested we might not be able to travel to the pool, I almost experienced a mutiny.

On our last day, which was the hottest, there was a project that required a handful of our students to stay back while the rest of the team traveled to the pool. The students who begrudgingly decided to stay back had to learn how to grout tile flooring for the first time in their life without air conditioning. Words cannot begin to describe how badly I felt for these students. Their one moment of relief from the heat had been taken away and been replaced with the worst conditions of the entire week. I thought of them the entire time we drove to and from the pool. Upon my arrival I expected to have three very frustrated students when I returned.

Imagine my surprise when I was greeted by the widest smiles I had seen all week from any student. While we were at the pool seeking refuge from the heat, these students formed a relationship with the owners and neighbors of the house. The way they described their work and experience truly made the rest of the team jealous. They learned a new skill, they heard the stories of the people they were serving, and they got to see the faces of gratitude for the work they had accomplished. They would tell you that they saw a glimpse of the Kingdom of God and saw God in action vividly while they worked in that hot house telling stories and grouting. Each one of those students said it was the highlight of their entire trip.

To think they almost went to the pool... Before Jesus sent his disciples out for their mission, I'm sure he knew they would often seek moments of relief and relaxation. The work they were assigned was no small task and I'm sure it wore them out. Which is why I think it's no coincidence that the first thing Jesus told them was "the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." Jesus knew that the opportunities of accomplishing the assigned task would far exceed the disciples' time and abilities. He also reminded them, as he reminds us, that we should seek to seize those opportunities. For when we do, we might be surprised by the outcome. We might see the kingdom of God in a way we never have. We might see God in action more vibrantly than ever before. Those are opportunities we don't want to miss.

KEY THOUGHT

God has granted you an opportunity to serve him today. Seize it.

PRAYER

God, give us the ears to hear and the eyes to see the opportunities you've laid before us. May you remind us that you've given us breath today, which means you have called us in some fashion. Grant us the strength to go where you send us so that we may see your kingdom come.

Ask The Lord

Luke 10: 2

By Kim DeVries

I was talking with my mom over a cup of tea and she said “I had a strange week. I met my neighbor.” In my head I was wondering why that would be strange, so I asked her to tell me more. She said, “I was on my way to run errands yesterday and I hit my neighbor’s son with my car!” I wondered why she didn’t start with that! I asked her how on Earth that happened. My mother then told me the accident wasn’t her fault. Apparently the middle-aged, intellectually disabled son rode his bike out in front of her. She explained that the man was not seriously injured, and he only had a few scrapes and bruises. After making sure she was okay she took him home.

Next, a meeting occurs. The meeting between my mom and the mom of the injured son. It quickly becomes apparent that this meeting was God ordained. My mom has lived near this woman for over six years and never met or seen her outside. However, the woman immediately falls crying into my mother’s arms and unloads a life of brokenness and need. She sobbed and cried out for help over the difficulties she’s facing in her life. As my mom tells me this story, I silently offer my own little prayer up to God. I thank him that this man was not more seriously injured. I again listen as my mom tells me more. She says, “the crazy thing is, I’ve been praying that the Lord would place someone in my life I could help and share the love of Jesus.” My mouth fell right open. I recovered and said “I guess God answered your prayer.”

My mother’s story reminds me of Luke 10:2 and how Jesus gives instruction saying, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Do you daily, or even weekly pray for the harvest? Do you ask the Lord as my mom asked the Lord to send someone to whom you can minister? Do we often ask the Lord to send out workers into his field to seek and save the lost? If I’m honest, I know this isn’t my first prayer. My first prayer is often for my family, or my needs. It’s not about the harvest and certainly not about his sending me out. Let us urgently ask the Lord, crying out to him that he will send more laborers into the field. Will you pray expectantly and willingly? Will you pray trusting that he will equip you and call you to complete the task?

KEY THOUGHT

Pray for God to send out more laborers into the field. Next time, listen, because he may be calling you!

PRAYER

Lord, we call on your name in urgency. Please Lord Jesus, bring more workers into the field. Help us all to listen when you speak, and help us to go when you call. Thank you for equipping us when we are sent. Amen.

Go

Luke 10: 3

By Rev George Vink

Looking closely at just the word, “Go!” evoked a somewhat still tender memory. The ceremony done, the bride and groom faced family and friends as I introduced them as “Mr. and Mrs.” But, instead of moving, the groom turned and looked quizzically at me, the pastor. I responded with an urgent, “Go, Go, Go...!” while thinking, “We’re done! There’s no more. Get going!” Imagine it! I’d introduced them using the bride’s maiden name.

Jesus told the disciples, “Go!” even adding an explanation. It’s not going to be a stroll along the Jordan, enjoying the scenery as you tour with friends. It’s doing something you’ve not done previously. There’s even risk involved and stringent conditions to be met. But, make no mistake about it, it is a command. The NIV’s exclamation mark underscores its nature. There is no choice involved. When Jesus commanded, “Go!” he didn’t add, “If you feel like it!” or “If you’re really ready.” That’s simply the nature of the command, brief as it may be!

The groom in the wedding scenario had every right to say, “We’ve not elected to use my wife’s maiden name. Please correct yourself, pastor!” But, he didn’t. He went proudly with his bride on his arm, later explaining, very gently, his reluctance to go. Is there a lesson to be learned?

After he had appointed the seventy-two, Jesus told them about the plentiful harvest and shortage of workers. It called for action. It called for them to go, even if there’s danger involved.

Today, it’s also time for us as his disciples to go. We may wonder, “Jesus, do you know what you’re telling us to do?” He does! We may not feel ready or even excited about it. He knows! He still says, “Go!” He adds details for the uncertain days ahead and expects obedience. No more, “Ready! Get set.” It’s now time to “Go!” The race to be run won’t happen by our being ready. Neither does it need us to be set anymore. It’s time for us be obedient. It’s time for us to go! What do you hear Jesus saying?

KEY THOUGHT

All too often we hesitate to obey Christ’s command and want more explanations when it’s really quite clear: It’s time to get going.

PRAYER

Dear Lord of the harvest, we hear you! Help us over our fears and simply obey and be willing to get hurt or rejoice. Just go with us and empower us with your Spirit. Amen.

Do Not Take

Luke 10: 4

By Rev Paul Sausser

When people enter into something new, it is not uncommon to have a backup plan. When going on vacation, we bring extra clothes just in case the weather changes or we get too much mud and/or sweat on our clothes. When you go on a first date, you can have a friend text you about one hour in case you want to bolt. That way you can give your date an excuse for cutting the date short. When in church if the sermon gets boring, one can pull out their week's to-do list and work on that so that the 30 minutes aren't wasted. Do we also backup plans when it comes to faith in Jesus?

I'm not asking if we have backup plans when it comes to salvation, but if we have backup plans when it comes to service. If a ministry isn't turning out the way we expected, do we look for a side door to exit? If the relationship is more giving than receiving, do we look for excuses to stop investing in a person?

In Luke's telling of Paul's conversion story in Acts 9, it really should be about Paul's commission story to preach the gospel. On the Damascus Road in His appearance to Saul, Jesus tells Saul that he will be told what to do (verse 6) with Ananias' obedient (though initially scary) ministry to Saul. Ananias reaffirms Jesus' commission to Saul. Conversion leads to commission. Salvation leads to service for all Jesus followers, not just for the select few. So in our service, do we have a backup plan?

When Jesus sends out the Seventy-Two, He tells them, "Do not take a purse, bag, or sandals." Jesus says don't take anything extra. He wants us to be vulnerable in trusting him to provide for it all—don't hold something in reserve in you back pocket just in case.

Some might call this vulnerable faith a foolish faith. Someone recently called it, more accurately, a "crazy faith." It's crazy enough to just follow and let God do His thing in and through you. It's crazy enough that if the service isn't working out as you planned, that God is still working His plan. His plan is where we need to put our trust. As we follow God's leading in going where He sends us, and in meeting new people, the Spirit directs us to who need grace. Let's not go into that relationship with our plan of how to sneak out if it isn't going well. Do not take up any backup plans, instead have a crazy faith.

KEY THOUGHT

Trust God for all you need in serving others, and don't look for an easy way out.

PRAYER

Father God, as you send me to places and people, help my faith to trust you to provide all that I need. I relinquish any plans I have of how to get away or make it be what we want it to be. Strengthen my trust that you are all I need. Amen.

Peace To This House

Luke 10: 5

By Rev Ed Viser

Does the idea of evangelism ever feel awkward, and even threatening to you? To me, at times, it does. Especially when I think of the bad models I've seen, or the rejection I may expect. Even when Jesus went to the villages of Israel during his life on earth, he encountered varying reactions. Some readily accepted his message, but others rejected him. In Luke 10, Jesus warns his disciples that they are going to run into the same reactions, both positive and negative, to the proclamation of the kingdom (Luke 10:6-12). Sometimes I feel awkward because it feels like I have to sell a product people don't want. How many of us rush to answer the door when Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormon missionaries are on the other side? Yet, what are we actually sharing? Jesus tells us it is shalom. It is peace.

Pronouncement of Shalom - He tells us that when we are sent into our community, we bless those who welcome us: "Peace to this house." God will not fail to reward them because we represent Jesus and the Father to them. For a worthy person, one who receives our message and ministry, we are to offer God's blessing of shalom. By biblical definition, shalom refers to a right relationship with God, other people, and the created world. Shalom encompasses one's well-being, health, and safety. It's about prosperity, wholeness, and completeness, both physically and spiritually. How many people don't need shalom in their lives? Where is that shalom needed specifically in our community? How might we take steps to bring shalom to our neighbors?

Promoter of Shalom - For a worthy person, one who receives our message and ministry, we are to offer God's blessing of shalom. That person is described as "someone who promotes peace." It sounds a bit like the prototypical disciple described in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the peacemakers." A person of peace is one whose heart is ready to welcome the kingdom. This assumes that the Holy Spirit is already working there ahead of us. We are simply joining him in his work. Do we recognize the Spirit's presence, with and ahead of us, as we are sent into our community?

Priority of Shalom - Notice also that Jesus says "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.'" What would it look like if we approached people that way? Peace first, before one's own opinions or agendas. What would it look like if we approached life that way? What if we approached personal conversations that way? What if we used Facebook posts or tweets that way? What if we put peace first, before our personal opinions?

KEY THOUGHT

We are to promote peace and well-being in our community, in our neighborhood, and in our schools.

PRAYER

Jesus, our Savior, our Sender, our Shalom, help me to be bold enough this week to share the shalom of your kingdom with those who need it. Amen.

Eating and Drinking

Luke 10: 7

By Rev Paul Sausser

“Birds of a feather flock together,” means people with similar tastes and interests hang together. People like to have a sense of security. We don’t have a safety net when we experience something uncharted. We like our little bubble.

When I was a night shift busboy at Denny’s, the busy time of night service started at 2 AM. That’s when the bars in town closed and Denny’s was the only open gig in town. The people who came to Denny’s at 2 AM were not the same kind of people who would hang out with my mom and dad. It was great! A wide variety of “birds” showed up, people that I never would have met any other way. Yet, it is not the same to rub elbows with or serve one who is different as to develop friendships with those who are unlike us.

The ancient (and modern) Middle Eastern concept of eating and drinking has to do with friendship. You share a meal with friends, not acquaintances. You may perhaps become friends with new people if you weren’t before. An invitation to a meal is an offer to enter into someone’s world, and a willingness of the host to enter into the life of the guest. Eating a meal together is about friendship.

While this is easier to do with “birds of a feather,” it is scarier to do with those who are not like us. When Jesus in Luke 25 presents the list of people we need not care for, it’s hard to not see the similarities we share with them. We of course also have needs, but the people Jesus helps are people such as the homeless or those imprisoned. These people are often pushed to the side by our society. Isn’t following these words of Jesus the true sign of Christian faith?

When Jesus sends the Seventy-Two, He tells them to “stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you.” He wants us to develop relationships. He desires for us to make friends. He urges us to build a family network. Don’t do drive by witnessing, but share the love of Jesus in the context of relationships. That means—make relationships.

The people that Father God leads to us are often those of a different feather. For the Seventy-Two, whoever invited them to dine, began as strangers and ended up as sisters and brothers. Jesus calls us to offer that hospitality to others, and not to limit it to people like us. Develop friendships with those who are different. Be willing to enter into the lives of strangers, so that as a sisterhood develops, sharing God’s love through Jesus has a good chance to stick and stay with them.

KEY THOUGHT

Ask God to lead you to new and different relationships in which you can share Christ.

PRAYER

Father God, as you send me to places and people, I trust you will lead me to people of your choosing, not mine. I relinquish my comfort and safety zone. Be my strength to join you in expanding the Kingdom of God through relationships. Amen.

Do Not Move From House To House

Luke 10: 7

By Rev Amy Schenkel

In the first five years of our marriage, we lived in five different places. Every Spring I used up every last can of food into a variety of creative dishes. I'd then prepare to put our kitchen supplies into printer-paper boxes which we would stack in a moving truck, and unload onto new shelves and drawers in a new apartment. The pattern of moving every Spring was so ingrained in us that, in the sixth year when we were living in the first house we bought, my husband looked in the cupboards in May and wondered why the cupboards were so empty!

Not only did we live in such a way that we could efficiently pack up our belongings in a day or two, we also put down the shallow roots that could easily be uprooted in these communities. As I try to recall our neighbors in each location, I realize that the longer we were in a place, the more names and characteristics I can remember. I wonder if any of them remember us.

In contrast, we have been in our current neighborhood for more than a decade. Over the years, we have shared in our neighbor's lives: we have mourned the deaths of elderly neighbors, celebrated births of newborns, and helped each other cleaned up after a small tornado. We've shared meals and childcare, and discussed politics and religion.

Why did Jesus want his followers to remain in one place? How is this an important practice of being sent out on mission? It is because through developing relationships we have the opportunity to show the love of Jesus to our neighbors. It is in the context of a relationship that we can most effectively share the good news of the gospel.

As our Christian, elderly neighbors age out of their homes, the neighbors who move in are typically not part of a faith community. They represent a younger generation and growing ethnic diversity. They care about the environment and being part of a community. Our continued presence in this neighborhood is an important missional practice because we have the opportunity to develop relationships through which we can truly share the love of Jesus with neighbors we love.

KEY THOUGHT

How is your presence in the neighborhood where you live a missional practice? How do you love your neighbors?

PRAYER

Creator God, who made each one of us in your image, may we reflect your love to our neighbors. May we love them as you love them, fully and completely. And we pray that in our relationships with our neighbors, your grace and truth will be known. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Cure the Sick

Luke 10: 9

By Amy Schenkel

I have spent quite a bit of time wondering about the contemporary relevance of the command in Luke 10 to “cure the sick” as a missionary practice. As I walk through my neighborhood, am I supposed to knock on doors and see if anyone has a cold so I can pray for them? Or is “sick” an analogy for anything that is broken? For example, like communities where hatred and injustices cause division and despair? Beyond understanding how to cure the sick, I want to understand why Jesus included this as an important missionary practice for the church.

Sometimes insight into a Scripture passage comes from unlikely places. In this case, the ‘ah-ha moment’ came from an article about research done by an agnostic journalist on why Christians often approach her in public places and pray that God would heal her physical blindness. This sometimes happens without prompting! These experiences left her feeling “judged as faulty and in need of repair.” In her interviews, she was surprised to find that disabled Christians feel the same way. When approached in this way, it makes them feel that in order to be a whole and complete person, they have to get rid of their disability. As a persons with a disability, they feel like they are a less-valued member of society. This does not sound like the message Jesus proclaims in the gospels, so how can we understand “cure the sick” in ministry?

The key, the article’s author has found, is understanding the historical context of Jesus’ day. She writes, “Jesus was operating at a time when being disabled meant being poor, unemployed, and excluded from mainstream society.” If you were blind, you were excluded from entering the temple and being part of the community of faith (John 9). If you were crippled, you were destined to beg at the city gates (Acts 3).

Jesus consistently looked out for the people who had been pushed to the margins of society and found ways to value them, include them, and love them. Long before ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) and discrimination laws, curing physical disabilities was the way he restored “the sick” to a right place in society where they could fully participate. They were once again able to use the gifts and talents God gave them.

When Jesus commands his followers to cure the sick, he is asking them to see the people who have been cast out to the margins of society. He calls us to love them as people made in the image of God, and to ensure they can fully participate in the community. Restoring people to social dignity is part of the Shalom-giving Jesus’ followers are called to do.

The article’s author was struck by one idea that I believe is at the heart of why Jesus calls us to cure the sick. She writes that “being alive and at peace with yourself while being blind is a bigger miracle than having your sight restored.” I would add, that this peace is found in a right relationship with God. It is evidence of the Kingdom of God. It’s a peace that we are called to live and share with others, especially those on the margins of society.

Who are the marginalized people God is asking you to see, love, and restore to social dignity? To whom are you called to share in the peace of God?

KEY THOUGHT

Who are the marginalized people God is asking you to see, love, and restore to social dignity, and to share in the peace of God?

PRAYER

Lord, help us to see people as you see them- as image-bearers of God who you have created with unique skills and gifts that can be used to glorify you. We pray that you will help us be bringers of your peace, that the miracle of the peace of God will be known in our communities. In the power of Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

The Kingdom of God has Come Near P.1

Luke 10: 9

By Jolene DeHeer

What does it mean when people say “the kingdom of God is near?” Several weeks ago I had the privilege of hearing Rev. Scott Hoezee preach an anointed sermon that skillfully answered that question. He said, “the kingdom of heaven comes near anywhere and everywhere the will of the King [...] is calling the shots.”* As I meditated on that, I was struck anew that drawing near to Christ enables us to experience and know the reality of God’s kingdom coming upon us.

Since drawing near to His presence is where we come to know the Father’s will and gain the ability to obediently do it. We need to daily make space for Him in our lives by both listening and talking to Him. We need to see Him in other people, and love Him more each day. Equipped with the sure knowledge of His powerful presence, we become ready to be sent out to declare the great good news of the nearness of God’s kingdom. Rev. Hoezee reminds us that this great news is not something we keep to ourselves. As individuals and as the church we are sent “out into God’s fallen world and give witness to the nearness of God’s kingdom.” We are called to not only tell people the truth of the nearness of God’s kingdom, but also to “show them this truth by ourselves living lives that make it clear that the power and the sway and the will of our eternal King are calling the shots in our lives.”

Is there any news more glorious than the hope of God’s kingdom being present? This is what the world needs to hear. God’s kingdom is near when we struggle with illness, relationships, finances, injustice, wars, and even death. The kingdom of God is near when we are walking paths of joy and gratitude. Are we daily drawn to prepare ourselves to be sent with the great news of God’s nearness? Are we hungering and thirsting for a deeper, more intimate connection with Christ? Are we eager and excited to obediently follow the call to share it not just in our churches and communities, but world-wide?

KEY THOUGHT

I leave you with this key thought from Rev. Hoezee, “Indeed, for us as witnesses to the wider world we need to make it clear that the kingdom of heaven has come upon us, and we never want to exit this kingdom. Not now, not ever. It is our very life!”

*Quotes used with permission.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus, for bringing God’s kingdom near. Thank you for giving us the privilege of sharing the good news of grace. Draw us ever closer to you and equip us to boldly proclaim, “The kingdom of God is near!”

The Kingdom of God has Come Near P.2

Luke 10: 9

By Keri Penning

“The kingdom of God has come near.”

Take a moment to read that again. Does it make your heart race a little?

The Message version of Luke 10 phrases it as “God’s kingdom is right on the doorstep.” Right there, just outside the door, within grasp! The disciples were sent out, and amid the warm welcomes, hospitality, and healing, the kingdom of God was near. However, there were doors slammed in faces, and rude comments spat at backs. The disciples perhaps endured jeers and unrest, certainly inhospitality. Dust shaken from shoes. The kingdom of God was near.

When the twelve headed out earlier in Luke 9, they had instructions from Jesus, specific do’s and do not’s for their trip. Upon returning and gearing up for their next outing (chapter 10), Jesus paired up the disciples to join their ranks and gave them similar instructions. However, this time he threw in an extra little bit about some wolves. Jesus didn’t mince words here - there was no moral of the story tucked away in a parable. He warned them straight out and to be straightened out was probably what they needed in order to be prepared for the hard work waiting for them in the upcoming towns.

All of us have hard times in our lives, but we, like the disciples, have been put in the know. Knowing doesn’t prevent the hard, but knowing can help you prepare for the hard. The disciples were sent out with the knowledge that they would be welcomed with doors opened wide, and in the same breath, they were put on alert for trouble on their journey.

Every day, we disciple. We are sent into our homes, work, and schools. We repeatedly walk within our routines, or unexpectedly in aisle 3. We often don’t know if the day will greet us with hospitality or something less favorable, and we often don’t know what wolves are waiting for us around the corner. In times of peace it’s easy to feel the nearness of God, to sense his kingdom in our midst. However, when the pendulum sways the other way, we shouldn’t be caught unaware. The Hard will come in all shapes, all sizes, and in one form or another, to everyone. As the disciples were sent town to town, so we are sent into spaces of peace one moment and a pack of wolves the next. Do take heart: The God who goes before you will never leave you nor forsake you. The kingdom of God has come near.

KEY THOUGHT

Be aware of God’s kingdom at work within the hard and easy spaces we’re sent in to live.

PRAYER

Father, you call us to go, but never where you haven’t already gone before. You don’t give us false hope of an easy journey but you do promise your nearness regardless of what our lives looks like right now. With the knowledge of easy and hard, teach us to look for your presence in all of it. Spirit, make us aware. Amen.

Shake Off the Dust of Your Feet

Luke 10:11

By Rev Ed Visser

Have you ever had to make the painful decision to stop assisting someone? Have you thought to let them reach the bottom because that was the only way they'd realize their need for help? Recently our family went through a very painful situation like that. Sometimes we have to do it in the church, with church discipline being the final attempt to get someone to see the errors of his or her ways.

In Luke 10:6-12, Jesus warns the disciples that not all reactions to their Gospel message are going to result in the positive blessing of shalom (Verses 6-9) and they may have to walk away (10-12). He even suggests that "intervention" will be necessary for the "holy" cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum(13-15).

The way one did this in Israel was to "shake off the dust of your feet." This acted parable was a ritual of renunciation, a custom the Pharisees used when leaving Gentile areas. It was God's judgment on those who failed to receive God's message; they did not want any dust of that place left on them. It is particularly striking that Jesus uses the Old Testament language of judgment on the pagans to refer to Israelite villages! This would have been shocking!

As we are sent into our community, Jesus warns us that some won't welcome us and we may, painfully, have to shut off contact. Jesus is drawing a line in the sand, the dividing line being whether they welcome or listen to his message. As an ambassador of Jesus Christ, your reception is his reception, (like failing to welcome a US ambassador would be an affront to the US). For someone to reject his disciples, is to reject Jesus! Not everyone will accept us, and at a certain point, we can move on. We cannot do it flippantly, and hopefully this will get them to sit up and take notice. It is also a humbling and healthy reminder that salvation comes from God, not us. Perhaps the Holy Spirit will use others who could reach them better, but Jesus instructs us, there's a time to shake the dust off your feet!

KEY THOUGHT

Is there someone who may need some distance from us? We can pray that the Spirit will use someone else to reach them.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, give us humility to understand that you are in charge of salvation, and a willingness to follow your lead. Amen

Woe to You

Luke 10:12

By Rev Bob Boersma

I was blessed to grow up with a dad who LOVED his eight kids very well. We adored having him around and he delighted in us. His love gave us broad boundaries of freedom to enjoy life, and enjoy life we did. However, because he loved us well, he did have firm boundaries. His love would not tolerate words, actions, or attitudes that were disrespecting and/or damaging to others or our family. We always knew when we crossed his boundaries because the look on his face was plain. He didn't have to say a word, but we knew there was impending doom. Trust me, the doom came. His look said "Woe to you Bob." I saw it more than a few times and I hated that look, but looking back it was one of the best gifts my Dad gave us. He loved us too much to let us disrespect and damage others or ourselves.

"Woe to you" is a warning found throughout God's word. It is found often in the prophets as God addressed his people and the nations around them. It is found in Revelation as God speaks of what is now and what is to come. Jesus often uses it in the gospels. It has the force of my Dad's look to his kids. It doesn't feel like love, but it comes from a heart of love. God loves us too much to let us disrespect and damage others or ourselves. He loves us too much to let us to wander down a path of destruction and not warn us. There is an impending doom and it will come.

We don't like the word "woe." Our culture, and an increasing part of our own hearts, wants to reject it and its negative feeling. It doesn't want to hear its promise of impending doom. More and more people proclaim, "Surely a God who loves us would never bring judgment on people." We don't have to like the warning anymore than I did my Dad's look, but we need to feel and understand the love behind it. We need to feel and understand the weight of human sinfulness and the doom it deserves and will receive. Yes, love has broad boundaries of grace and freedom to live life. It is what Jesus comes to model and offer—"life and life to the full!" (John 10:10) but love has firm boundaries and Jesus' message has a "woe" of impending doom. We can hate that word, but it is one of the God's best gifts. He loves us too much to let us and those around us live without his love forever.

And may the significance of this word "woe" motivate our love to boldly share not only the hard "woe," but also wonderful grace of the gospel.

KEY THOUGHT

We are sent so let us go with love in our hearts. If there is no love we can't say "woe" well at all. It will feel like self righteousness. However, God's love is in us, so we can go. Go with the significance of this word "woe," and may it motivate our love to share both the hard "woe," and the wonderful grace of the gospel.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may the significance of this word "woe" motivate me to share boldly your truth while also putting your grace on display so it reveals good news to those you call me to love. In Jesus name, Amen.

Listen or Reject P.1

Luke 10:16

By Wayne Ondersma

The other day I went to a diner and as I was seated the waitress stopped by the table and asked me what I wanted to drink. I told her water and on she went. A few minutes later she came back and said, "I didn't hear what you wanted," so I told her again.

It reminded me that we struggle to take time to listen to each other. Listening is a lost art. In a world of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, words are quickly losing their meaning. When we keep our faces in our computers, phones, and other devices, we seem to be taking away the art of listening.

Listening is defined as "paying attention or making a conscious effort to hear." Listening is the act of caring enough for the person speaking that you take your mind off yourself and place it consciously onto the one speaking.

When God spoke from the mountain in Exodus, the people trembled with fear and cried out to Moses to stop God from speaking to them directly. They said, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." However, if you are a student of The Word, you will realize that not only did they not want to hear God speak, but they also stopped listening to Moses.

Jesus said in Luke 10:16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me."

I work with students and have noticed a growing disrespect that some students have decided not to listen to their teachers. The students don't realize that their own rejection of the truth will some day turn back and hurt their own lives. This example, is the meaning of the passage. One cannot say, "I love and follow God" and then turn around and reject the Word of God in the mouths of those sharing it.

Regardless from whom, the Word of God should arrest our hearts and draw us together with all those who believe. We should have the attitude of Paul when he speaks of those who preach God's word out of selfish ambition verses those out of sincere hearts. He says "the important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice." Here is a man who passionately listened at the foot of the Cross.

KEY THOUGHT

As you think about your daily communication, stop and take a moment to reflect on who you are listening to and what they are truly saying.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to become better listeners and yet know when you call us to talk about you with others. Amen

Listen or Reject P.2

Luke 10:16

By Rev Bob Boersma

Almost every Sunday I have the weighty privilege of speaking God's word to his people. Jesus says, "He who listens to you listens to me." WHAT!? Seriously? Seriously. I feel the weight of that and it can feel crushing at times. To speak on God's behalf has more significance than I can fathom, deserve, or want. However, it's not just me who bears that weight.

Speaking for God is my responsibility and if you follow Jesus it is yours as well. You may never preach a sermon in front of a church, but you are called to speak every day of his good news to those you meet. If, and when, you realize that you will also feel the weightiness of our calling, it matters. It matters more than we realize.

What frees me to get up there on Sundays is that my responsibility ends there. I speak for God and I want to do that well. So, I prepare well and I do my best to share well. However, I can't make people listen to what I say. This devotional is another offering that I speak on God's behalf. I worked hard at it. I can't, though, determine how you will respond. You can read about your calling to prepare and speak well on God's behalf and never do it. You can reject my words, but it is not me you are rejecting. WHAT!? Seriously? Seriously.

The response of listening or rejecting a word from God is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit and the person receiving it. We can trust the Holy Spirit to work to apply God's truth to those we speak to him for. That is my confidence every Sunday as I preach. It is your confidence too, as you share the gospel. The responsibility to receive the message is on the one who hears it. Amazingly, we like our first parents, can grieve, resist, and reject God's word to us. This too is a weighty thing and often we do not realize it. We seldom realize that if we listen and respond in faith, we listen to God and receive more of the life he wants for us. We usually don't see that when we reject God's word to us, we reject God and the life he wants for us. As you can see, both speaking and listening are weighty.

I hope you are listening well to Jesus as we together study Luke 10 and its message. I hope you have listened well and by now realize that we all as Christians are SENT to speak on God's behalf. I hope you feel the weight of that and prepare well. I hope you also find the freedom to speak boldly and release the responsibility to the Spirit and the person who receives it. I know it increases my freedom and boldness, and by God's grace it has set many who listened free. Weighty? Yes! Amazing? YES!! We are SENT and get to be part of setting people free! WHAT!? Seriously? Seriously.

KEY THOUGHT

Although we have the weighty responsibility to share and show the gospel of Jesus, we are not responsible for how people respond to it.

PRAYER

Lord, I know you have called me to show and share your good news. It is a wonderful and weighty responsibility. May you empower me by your Spirit to do so with joy and courage. As I do so, I will release the results to you in how those around me respond to it. In Jesus name, Amen.

Rejoice

Luke 10:20

By Rev Arek O'Connel

In Luke 10, Jesus sends his disciples out on a mission with explicit instructions. We don't get a detailed report on what they did, how they accomplished it, or how long it took them. Although, we do receive one important detail, "The seventy-two returned with joy." They saw God in action. They saw him in a way that perhaps no one had seen up until that point, and maybe, will never see again until heaven. They were given authority and power in the name of Jesus which was most likely very foreign to them. They proclaimed to Jesus that "even the demons submit to us in your name" which leads us to believe that they had to have witnessed what can only be described as kingdom miracles.

This brought them joy, first and foremost. When we do work that is meaningful and makes a difference, it's no secret that it is incredibly rewarding. When we realize that we are capable of doing great things, it often brings us incomparable joy. It is not hard to fall in love with our abilities when we are successful and it's tempting to try and recreate the scenarios in which we can experience that joy again.

Jesus knows this about us and he knew it about the disciples. Which is why he made sure to reorient the source of their joy. He reminded the disciples that it is not our abilities we should rejoice in, but in our standing before the God who sent us. That should be the source of our joy. "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (vs. 20) is such a humbling reminder for the disciples and for us today.

God sends and calls each and every one of us. As a child of God, he will give you opportunities to serve him and by the grace of God, you will sometimes experience great success. In those moments where you experience success and you're tempted to rejoice in what YOU achieved, step back and remind yourself that your success is a gift from God. Each and every one of our gifts and abilities are in and of themselves a gift we have received from the one who calls us his children. We need to remind ourselves that the fact he calls us children, is cause for us to rejoice.

KEY THOUGHT

Rejoice that God calls you His regardless of your success and failure.

PRAYER

God, whether we fail or succeed this side of heaven when you send us, may our source of joy be in the fact that we are one of your children that you send in the first place. May we not rejoice in our success and may we not get too down in our failures, but rejoice that in success and failure, you have written our names in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

Through the Holy Spirit

Luke 10:21

By Jolene DeHeer

Throughout Luke 10, Jesus is encouraging people to go. He encourages them to go reap the harvest, go bring peace, and go proclaim the Kingdom of God is near. He wants us to go overcome the enemy, and go show mercy. One could argue that is a pretty intimidating list of things we are called to go and do. Reaping the harvest can call us to go to places that are outside our comfort zone. Sometimes the people who need the peace of God reject it. It takes courage to speak up about our faith and proclaim the nearness of God's kingdom. Besides, the evil one is a formidable adversary. Being merciful to those we don't know or worse yet, those who have hurt us, is profoundly difficult! Is God serious about this?

He sure is! He knows we won't be able to do it in our own power. We can't. We are too human. So, God gave the indwelling Holy Spirit to all who believe in Christ. God has done His part. Now we need to do our part by consciously and intentionally submitting to the Spirit's leading by opening our hearts, minds, and souls to the working of the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Sadly, some people don't experience the fullness of the Spirit's presence because they mistakenly rely on their own abilities and strengths, forgetting the supernatural force dwelling inside. However, as soon as they surrender to the working of the Spirit, the results are beyond their wildest dreams. They discover abilities and strengths greater than their natural selves. They see evidences of God's kingdom being built through their obedience. Lives are changed. People are blessed with salvation. God is glorified!

In addition, we also experience joy that comes only when we totally surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice the emotion Jesus felt after hearing the good news of the Spirit's work in and through the disciples. It was joy. Pure, unadulterated joy through the Holy Spirit! That is one of the blessings of obediently "going in the power of the Holy Spirit" to wherever God calls us.

KEY THOUGHT

God knows we cannot do the work we have been sent to do on our own so we are given the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the indwelling, all-powerful Holy Spirit. Help me to faithfully, boldly go wherever you call, fully relying on the Spirit's power within me. Amen.

Revealed Them to Little Children

Luke 10:21

By Rev Paul Sausser

One of the greatest things about being around children is that they aren't shy about what they say. They don't beat around the bush, they just cut straight to the chase. They also take things because they are hungry to learn. As soon as they grasp something new, they will share it with someone. There is this wonderful humbleness and openness about children.

Those who are older have learned to put on more of a veneer. We are careful about what we say, what we express, and what we share regarding what is going on inside of us. There are lots of reasons for this. One reason is to put on a persona that we are mature, and that we have it together. We want to show this facade even if it is not true. When we do this, it's about pride.

Jesus was surrounded by people who wanted others to think that they had it together. They were smart in their own eyes. Some of these people had official titles (like Pharisee) while others didn't. The wise and learned people around Jesus were the proud. They are not open. However, those to whom Jesus reveals his love, grace, and teachings are humble. The humble want to learn, they want to share, they want to open their hearts and minds.

After Jesus gave instruction to the Seventy-Two, He prays, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children." Little children refer to the humble ones, the ones who show the openness of a child. Little children is not a reference to age, although it can be, but more about those who have an open heart. A proud heart is a closed heart. It is a heart and mind that believes they know best.

So, when our Savior Jesus sends us, the wise and learned will say "it is too hard," and "it is not where I want to go." The proud may say "I think I know how to better use my talents than to follow His direction." However the little ones, the humble, trustingly obey the authority. We learn from a young age to sing, "Here I am Lord, send me." Those who are humble of heart will express the faith we see in little children.

KEY THOUGHT

Ask God to give you an open and humble heart to go wherever and to whomever He sends you.

PRAYER

Father God, thank you that in your love you reveal yourself and your way to us. May we be receptive to your call, big or small, to where you want us to be. Forgive us when we believe we know better than you. Amen.