

Luke 10.1-20

Go: I am sending you

Christ Church Selly Park

Sunday 5 March 2023

Come and Go: Living with Jesus [7]

‘I am sending you’

Here is a well-known rhythm: *clap Beethoven’s Fifth*. I often have rhythms going through my mind – and because I have a rather restless leg I’m often tapping a rhythm out with my foot. It used to drive my parents mad when I was doing my homework in my bedroom upstairs, tapping on the floor...

The rhythm of discipleship is rather calmer – more like breathing in and out, or the gentle washing of waves on the shore. We come to Jesus, we go with Jesus – we come to Jesus, we go with Jesus. Sometimes in life we might have an extended period of one or the other, but I have found that usually it’s more of a daily rhythm – to go alongside breathing, eating, working and resting.

So although we might describe our passage this morning as a ‘mission trip’, it can still teach us what it means to ‘go’ every day.

This passage goes with the beginning of chapter 9. There Jesus sends the Twelve – but so we know this isn't only about them in particular or church leaders in general, in chapter 10 we have Jesus sending out **seventy-two others** (1). In today's terms, if Jesus and his followers were a church, the Twelve would be the leadership team, and the **seventy-two** the congregation: it's for all of us.

I like the bit in verse 2 where Jesus invites them to pray:

'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'

Luke 10.2 (NIV)

Then he tells them *they* are the answer to that prayer:

'Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending *you*...'

Luke 10.2-3 (NIV)

Friends that is a word for us. I expect most of us here long to see new disciples, to see people becoming Christians. I expect most of us pray for that to happen. But most of the time Jesus answers that prayer by saying, '**Go! I am sending you...** if you want people to know about me, they need to be told – so **I am sending you.**'

Go: now

I'm no farmer, but I have watched *Clarkson's Farm*. In the first series there's an episode where his field of barley is ready, but he can't find anyone with a combine harvester. There's a huge panic (no doubt exaggerated for the TV) because barley has to be harvested when its moisture content is in a particular range. Get it wrong and the crop will be too dry or it will rot.

Almost every person listening to Jesus would have understood that 'harvest' goes with 'urgent'. Even more so when **'the harvest is plentiful'**. Even *more* so when **'the workers are few'** (2).

'Go,' says Jesus – Go *now*. We see this urgency in verse 4 as well, when Jesus tells them, **'do not greet anyone on the road.'**

I'm sure most of us know what it's like when we're in a hurry, and we run into someone who *really* wants to talk. We don't want to be rude; nor do we want to be late; but the person isn't picking up the passive aggressive way we're checking our watch or looking over their shoulder...

Jesus was not telling them to be rude, but he *was* telling them not to delay, not to be distracted from the vital task of sharing the gospel, the good news of the kingdom: the King is here!

Oh, how good I am at being distracted! When I pray my mind wanders all over the place. When I write a sermon suddenly housework seems much less like a chore.

Other distractions are more serious. I'm distracted by fear of rejection, so I don't tell people about Jesus. I'm distracted by a desire to be liked, so when I do tell them about him I focus on love and 'forget' to talk about the cost of discipleship. I'm distracted by the broken world, so I give in to despair. I'm distracted by my sinful desires, so I hide away in shame.

We need to identify what distracts us not so we feel bad, but to help us go with the urgency of harvest-time. Hear these words:

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Hebrews 12.1-2 (NIV)

What distracts *you*? What takes *your* eyes off Jesus? What stops *you* from obeying Jesus' command to '**Go**'? What excuses do *you* use to ignore the urgent harvest? You may find it helpful to talk to a trusted Christian friend about those questions – not to make yourself feel bad, but so we can do something about it.

Go: together

Go *now*, Jesus says: the task is urgent. But don't go alone, go *together*; Jesus sent the seventy-two out **two by two** (1). He did that because when we proclaim the good news of God's kingdom come, it's (a) dangerous, and (b) easy to get discouraged.

It's dangerous

There was a straightforward practical side to Jesus sending them out in pairs. There were many dangers on the roads in those days, from robbers to wild animals. Going in pairs was, quite simply, a safer way to travel.

But there is spiritual danger as well, which is perhaps more relevant to us here today. Jesus said (3): **'Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.'** I'm as much shepherd as I am farmer – which is to say, not at all – but I'm confident that when a pack of wolves finds a flock of sheep there's only one outcome. And Jesus doesn't even give us the dignity of being *sheep*: **'I am sending you out like lambs.'** Lambs are cute, but pathetic.

Friends, make no mistake we are in a spiritual battle, and the enemy has real power: he is the wolf, we are the lambs. Faced with the wolf's power, we lambs don't stand a chance.

But with Jesus the tables are turned. Look with me at verse 17:

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’

He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’

Luke 10.17-20 (NIV)

This does not mean disciples of Jesus are immune to physical **harm** or **snake** bites **and scorpion** stings – far from it, as the many Christian martyrs will testify. But ultimately, *nothing* – even the power of **the enemy** – can take away the fact that our **names are written in heaven** (20) – picture language that means we belong to God and who we are as his children can *never* be taken away.

We are in a spiritual battle: we will see gains as people are released from addiction, healed of diseases, forgiven through faith and repentance – and we will see setbacks, things we don’t understand and can’t explain. The enemy’s power and the danger is real, but so is the victory that Jesus won for us on the cross.

It's easy to get discouraged

But let's dig into those setbacks a little with the second point here: it's easy to get discouraged. Did you notice that in his instructions to the seventy-two Jesus spends more time talking about people who reject the message than those who accept it? Verse 10:

[Jesus said,] 'When you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God has come near." I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to [the realm of the dead].'

Luke 10.10-15 (NIV)

Verses like this don't fit well with the way many of us picture Jesus – but if we want *Jesus* and not a projection of *ourselves* we need to hear what he *actually* said and did – and that's not always easy.

The point here is simple: not everyone will accept the message of the gospel: the good news that God's kingdom is come, that the power of **the enemy** is being broken, that there is more to life than this, that those who repent are forgiven and receive new life.

Bethsaida and **Capernaum** – and presumably **Chorazin** – were all places where *Jesus* ministered. In those places *Jesus* preached the gospel. In those places *Jesus* did miracles. They had Jesus himself in front of them, and yet they still did not respond or repent.

It isn't easy when friends and family ignore the message we long for them to accept. What this passage does is release us from the guilt we feel when we share the gospel and someone rejects it. In verse 16 Jesus says it's *him* people **listen to** or **reject**, not us – and the sad truth is many have and still do reject him.

As an aside, I don't recommend wiping **the dust** off your shoes (11) and storming off when that happens; and I don't think Jesus means we should give up on people when they reject the gospel. Those instructions – like the ones about not taking **a purse or bag or** [extra] **sandals** (4) – make most sense as specific to that time, when the point was for the **seventy-two** to work through various towns and villages, preparing for Jesus' arrival. They weren't to waste time in a place that didn't want to know.

And yet.

I studied with a non-Christian friend at university, and every now and then she would ask me about my faith. But the moment I started to talk about Jesus, something happened in her eyes – it was like the words I spoke were being plucked out of the air before they reached her. I always answered when she asked, but there was no point investing significant time in it, because she simply never listened. She never responded to an invitation, even when it involved free food.

I lived near another friend for a few years. He wasn't a Christian either but he was interested in faith; we had a few conversations about it, but he was never ready to respond personally. I didn't brush the dust off my feet and walk away – but neither did I bang on about Jesus constantly. I tried to make the most of opportunities to talk about faith, but never seemed to get through. After four years I moved away and not long after that someone else invited him on an Alpha Course; he went, and now his life is slowly being transformed.

We need wisdom here and trust: wisdom to know when someone isn't listening or it isn't their time, and trust that others will play their part as well – there are many of us sharing this mission.

Whether we are facing physical or spiritual danger, or we are feeling discouraged, it helps to know we are not alone. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our sisters and brothers in Christ. We are to pick one another up when we stumble. We are to pray for one another, to keep one another going, to help one fix our eyes on Jesus.

Thank the Lord that Jesus sends us out *together*, not alone.

Go: out

Finally, where does Jesus send us? *Out*. Verse 2: **‘Ask the Lord of the harvest to send *out* workers...’** Verse 3: **‘Go! I am sending you *out*...’**

This is part of the daily rhythm of being a disciple. Lovely and vital as it is to come to Jesus, to sit at his feet, to rest there with him – he also sends us *out*.

The LICC stuff about frontlines is helpful here. This is not (necessarily) about preaching on the street or knocking on doors. Your frontline may be your work, your family, your friends, the carers who come to your home, the people you meet down the gym – wherever *you* are day by day, whomever *you* meet during the week: *that* is your frontline, the place Jesus is sending *you*.

You see, God does not only work inside church walls or within the church family. Luke begins this section by saying (1):

The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

Luke 10.1 (NIV)

Jesus sent them **ahead of him**, to the places **he was about to go**. They – and we – are like heralds, announcing that there’s a new King in town (only his name isn’t Charles, it’s Jesus).

But they were to discover that God was *already there*, he was *already at work* in people in those towns and villages. Verse 5:

[Jesus said,] ‘When you enter a house, first say, “Peace to this house.” If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you.’

Luke 10.5-6 (NIV)

During the final lockdown I had a phone call from someone whose wife had died. The funeral had taken place a few weeks before, but he was having bad dreams and was anxious that she wasn’t at peace because the funeral service hadn’t been taken by a Christian minister.

At the time we were allowed to be in people's gardens so I visited and listened. We prayed together, we did a short service and I shared the gospel message of the peace that comes from Jesus. I invited him to come to our Place of Welcome and he said he'd like to. People often say things like that so to my shame I did a mental eye-roll – but I did agree to let him know when we were reopening so he could be there. I did, and he was, the very first week we were back. After a couple of weeks we invited him to come to a service – the next Sunday he was there.

God was at work in that man's life long before I answered the phone. There are countless people out there in whom God is at work, in all sorts of ways. Jesus wasn't lying when he said, '**The harvest is plentiful**' – though it's easy to doubt his words (that's one of the enemy's oldest and best tricks: to sow seeds of doubt).

One of the most important things for us as disciples of Jesus is to trust and put into practice the words of Scripture. In Matthew 7.24 Jesus says his teaching – all Scripture, the word of God which bears witness to Jesus *the* Word of God – is solid rock, the only foundation that can withstand the storm. Jesus is not lying: **the harvest is plentiful** – and it is out there, on our frontlines.

Search and rescue

Jesus is describing here something like a search and rescue operation: searching out those in whom God is already at work in the world, those who are ready to hear the message of the kingdom, those who feel there must be *more* – searching them out and rescuing them from the darkness by pointing them to Jesus.

It's not about us being arrogant or thinking we're better than everyone else – it's about us sharing the most precious thing we have with anyone and everyone: Jesus Christ.

For ultimately this search and rescue operation belongs to him. We go ahead of him like heralds (1), we find he is already at work there (6). We go with his authority (19), in his name (17), and at his command (3).

The task is urgent – Jesus says: go *now*.

The task is hard – Jesus says: go *together*.

The harvest is plentiful – Jesus says: go *out*.

Jesus says, '**Go! I am sending you...**'