

Proclaiming the Kingdom

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How many of you remember the moment this week when you realized the Phillies were going to the World Series? I remember. I was in bed trying to sleep. Suddenly fireworks were going off, people were screaming, horns were honking. There was even a helicopter circling overhead. I knew we were going to the World Series. It's kind of hard to misunderstand something like that.

When Jesus came, it was a lot like Wed. night. Exciting things happened. People were healed, demons and evil spirits were cast out of people, people were raised from the dead, Jesus fed thousands of people at one pop with just a small bit of food, Jesus walked on the water, and he taught as the people had not heard before – with great authority. But they weren't completely sure what was going on. It wasn't as clear to them what was going on as it was to me when I heard the fireworks and helicopters and horns and shouts on Wed. night. As we read through the stories about Jesus, we see that people had a lot of opinions about him. In fact, in Luke ch. 9 – Jesus asks his disciples “who do the crowds say I am?” They answered all over the board – some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say one of the prophets who has come back to life. There was a need for an explanation of what was going on.

What was happening was that the kingdom of God was breaking in to the world. The Messiah had come and he was overthrowing the spiritual powers of darkness. But there was a need to explain that. And that's where the mission of the disciples, and today our mission as the Church, comes in. In Luke 10, Jesus sent out 72 disciples to all the towns and places where he himself was about to go and Jesus gave them a mission. Now these 72 do not include the 12 disciples. They had been sent out in Luke 9 with the same mission. These are 72 others. Let's look at what Jesus told them to do.

Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. This means there are many people who are ready to hear the good news of Jesus and they were to pray that God would release more people to tell about Jesus even as they themselves were going to do just that. Maybe they would have thought that 72 people is a lot of

people to be going around talking about Jesus but Jesus is telling them, the harvest is bigger than what you have seen so far and bigger than what you are about to see so you need to be asking God to send out more and more workers.

He told them not to take anything extra with them in verse 4. Now why would he tell them not to take money or sandals or anything and to not greet anyone on the road? I think it has to do with his statement that he's sending them out like lambs among wolves. They are to go out vulnerable, weak, dependent on others, but also focused on their mission. They weren't to waste their time or get distracted by anything.

Apparently in this culture, when you met someone on the road, it was a complicated business of greeting them and Jesus didn't want his disciples distracted or held up. He wanted them focused on their mission which was not on the roads but in the towns.

By being dependent, they needed the hospitality of the people they were going to. Jesus told them, starting in verse 5, that when they entered a house, they were to offer peace and to stay there eating and drinking whatever was given to them. He did say that if the homeowner was a person of peace their peace would remain on him but if not, the peace would return to the disciples. In either case they were to stay in that house and accept the hospitality offered them. I'm thinking if the person didn't accept the peace offered to them, the hospitality could be pretty stingy. But that's where they were to stay. They were not to go around from house to house looking for the place with the best food or the softest bed.

When they entered a town and were welcomed, they were to eat what was set before them, heal the sick, and tell the people that the kingdom of God was near them. When they were not welcomed in a town, they were to wipe off the dust of that town from their feet, basically saying – We've fulfilled our responsibility to you. But still they were to say "The kingdom of God is near."

Jesus finished his instructions by saying "Whoever listens to you listens to me and whoever rejects you rejects me and whoever rejects me, rejects him who sent me."

V. 16

I see two things the disciples were to do as they went to these towns and cities. They were to accept whatever hospitality was offered them, whether it was stingy or great, and they were to tell the people the kingdom of God was near. The telling is

important. By healing the sick they were showing in a flashy way that the kingdom of God was near. That's like the fireworks and horns when the Phillies won. You know something big has happened. The telling explains why the flashy things are happening. The sick are being healed because the kingdom of God is near. They were preparing the way for Jesus to come so they spread the word that the kingdom of God is near. The Messiah is on his way here right now and these healings show that His power and authority are already at work. So proclaiming this message and demonstrating the power of the kingdom through healing is important.

But accepting the hospitality is also showing that the kingdom of God is near. When we come together, as this mixed up, mismatched group of people, and we greet each other with smiles and hugs, we ask each other about our week and how things are going, we pray for each other, we listen to each other, we sing songs in each other's languages (although we haven't sang in Tagalog yet), we show that the kingdom of God is near. But not everybody is going to understand that. Even when flashy things happen – people being healed, prayers being answered, people speaking in tongues – not everybody is going to understand that this means the kingdom of God is near. That's why the telling is important.

Over these next several weeks Pastor Peter and I will be talking about the Church – it's mission and identity. One big piece of the mission of the church is to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. One obvious way that happens is in the preaching. It also should be happening in the children's classes now through the teaching. It should have happened earlier in our singing and praying. It should happen when the sermon is over and people come forward for prayer. It should be happening in women's bible study and in growth groups and in the Exploring our Faith class on Thurs. nights and in the men's group on Sat.'s. Everytime we gather we should be communicating the message that the kingdom of God is near. In our conversations with others, in our family relationships, in friendships, we should be communicating that the kingdom of God is near. That is what the church, and the people who make up the church do. Yet it's not always easy to communicate that message in words.

This is one reason why I believe Jesus told the 72 to go dependent on the hospitality of others. We communicate when we humble ourselves and accept what others offer us. When we take the time to enter the lives of others, we create the space for that person to encounter Jesus in us.

But, I hear people say, I can't teach somebody else because I don't really know the Bible very well. I can't tell somebody else about Jesus because I've messed up so bad in my life. But that's precisely why we can speak to others and tell them about Jesus. You may not know the Bible very well, but you do know Jesus and you know what He's done and continues to do in your life. Talk about that. That's proclaiming the kingdom of God. When we talk about what God is doing in our own lives, how He's giving us strength, how He forgives us, how He's answering our prayers, that's proclaiming the Kingdom of God. And just to show you that that is what we are to talk about, let me read what the apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:1. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." We talk about our experiences with Jesus, what actually happens to us. This is proclaiming the kingdom of God. And we can talk about what God has done for us when we are in relationship with people.

Proclaiming the kingdom of God and sharing hospitality with others is meant to go hand in hand. God means for us to get involved in people's lives so we can speak into their lives. The disciples were to go into a house and speak peace to the homeowner. The homeowner might reject their peace. That wasn't their concern. Whether the homeowner accepted or rejected their peace, they were still to speak it. When they went to a town and the town rejected them, they were still responsible for proclaiming that the kingdom of God is near. We are not responsible for whether or not people accept what we have to say. We are responsible for saying it. But we can't say it if we aren't in some type of relationship with people. And when we are in relationship with people we have a better idea of how to say things so that they will be heard.

I have never been too comfortable with street evangelism although I've done it. Now I enjoyed parts of it. When I was in London we used to perform mimes on the

street and then try to get in conversations with people and talk to them about the mimes we just did and witness and I enjoyed doing the mimes. I had some good conversations and some not good conversations. But I never saw the people after that. Even if I talked to someone and they were interested in hearing more, there wasn't a system in place to follow up with them. We would try to connect people with a local church but there really wasn't a way for us to stay connected with the people long term. And it's hard to talk to a stranger on the street who you know nothing about, and try to share something that would be meaningful to them because you don't know what might be meaningful for them to hear. All you can do is share your own story and hope it helps.

It's a different experience when you have an ongoing relationship with someone and you know what's going on in their life and you can share your experience with Jesus and pray and stay in touch with each other. Jesus meant us to be in relationship with each other, sharing the kingdom of God.

The last thing I want to point out from this passage is that the disciples went out because Jesus sent them out. Jesus is lord over the Church. We get our instructions and our mission from Him. He has the authority and power to deploy the church. He has deployed us here into the Oxford Circle neighborhood, into the neighborhoods of Philadelphia where we live and work, and into the network of relationships that we each have. And he has given us power and authority over the evil one. In Luke 10:19, Jesus says he's given us authority to overcome all the power of the enemy. But we do so as he directs. How do we know his direction? We have to be in relationship with him. Just as we can best speak to people we are in relationship with, Jesus can best speak to us when we are in relationship with Him. He says in v. 20, "do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." He's saying, don't get caught up in the flashy things, but value most the fact that you are in relationship with me and I know you by name.

Flashy things are fun. It's great fun when exciting things are happening, people are getting saved, getting healed, prayers are being answered, miracles are being done, the Phillies are going to the World Series. But when flashy things start happening, we can lose sight of the one doing them. That's when we can miss God's purposes. In

Luke 9 the disciples started getting distracted by flashy things. In verse 46 and onwards, they started arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest. Then a little further down, when they faced some opposition, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven on the people who wouldn't welcome them to their village. Jesus had to get on his disciples and set them straight. They weren't in tune with what He was doing. He came to serve, not to push himself forward as being the greatest. He came to forgive sins, not call down fire from heaven. The disciples were close to Jesus, but they still got off track. We'll get off track too from time to time. But because we are in relationship with Jesus, He will get on us and "jerk our chains" so to speak, until we get back with His program because He loves us and He wants us working with Him in proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is near.

So to pull this all together, the mission of the church is to proclaim the kingdom of God and to do so, whenever possible, in the context of relationship, accepting the hospitality of those around us, sharing in the lives of those outside the church so we can invite them in. We are to be entering the lives of the people around us and speaking peace to them, speaking the message of the kingdom of God. And that message is simply what we ourselves have experienced in knowing Jesus. We simply tell our story. We do this because Jesus is the head of the Church and it is what He tells us to do. He has given us authority over the enemy and there is nothing that will harm us.