

# Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

## LORD OF THE HARVEST

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

*10:1. After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of them in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 And 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. 3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7 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. 8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 '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.' . . .*

*16 Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me." 17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name*

*even the demons submit to us!” 18 He said them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. 19 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. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”*



## **DIAGNOSIS: So Near Yet So Far**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Never Ready***

Jesus' preaching and healing ministry is broadly known, yet little is known about what Jesus' followers were doing at this time. In 9:1-6, the Twelve were sent out to heal and to proclaim God's promised kingdom—the same as Jesus! Again, the same is asked of the Seventy in the text before us, only here they were to go ahead of Jesus towards Jerusalem. Although they were empowered to do a few mighty deeds, no one was ready to hear or heed their message. Consequently, the Seventy were instructed to “dust” off rejection (v. 11) as they left.

## ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Anticipated Failure***

Jesus anticipated their failure. The messianic “peace” they would bring would not be recognized (vv. 5-6); failure should be expected (vv. 10-11, 16). So when they return joy-filled because the demons submit to them, Jesus declares that their confidence is misplaced (v. 20). Jesus had assured them that their ministry was authorized and empowered by “the Lord of the harvest” (v. 2), “the kingdom of God has come near” (v. 11). But they had placed their trust in their deeds and not the source of their power.

## ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Failure of the Kingdom***

Neither the mission of the Twelve, nor the mission of the Seventy, nor Jesus’ own ministry met with much success. Though authorized and empowered by the Lord of the harvest, the kingdom of God failed to materialize. The cross ended all hope of that—or so it would seem.

## **PROGNOSIS: The Harvest Begins**

### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): “Yet Know This” (v. 11)***



The Lord of the harvest knows better. Like the proverbial mustard seed (13:19), the kingdom of God springs from an apparently insignificant beginning. The mission of the Twelve, then the Seventy, like that of Jesus, looked like a failure,

especially from the perspective of Calvary. Yet, Jesus' resurrection from among the dead tells a different story. What looked like failure was nevertheless, from the perspective of the empty tomb, the fast-approaching kingdom of God. As a later apostle, having seen the risen Lord, would put it, we now "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Death—that is, clinging onto self—is behind us now. Life—that is, loving all others—is before us now. Such is the kingdom of God.

***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Anticipate Success!***

How is failure a success? Or is this a cultic word-game designed to prop up a promise that never materialized? When Luke wrote

his Gospel, some 60 years after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus' anticipated return in glory was already past due. This is evident, for example, in the multiple missions of Jesus (representing the election of Israel), the Twelve (representing the twelve tribes), and the Seventy (representing all the gentile nations). Although the kingdom of God had not yet arrived, Jesus could say "The harvest is plentiful" (v. 2), and "the kingdom of God has come near" (v. 11). Because Jesus' resurrection involves all who trust in him, Luke could assert—in the teeth of everything that seems otherwise—that those who labor in the harvest will find it "plentiful" (v. 2).

#### ***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Why Wait?***

In the preceding chapter of Luke's Gospel, he hints at what a plentiful harvest looks like. When the crowds were hungry, Jesus instructs his disciples, "You give them something to eat!" (9:13). Only then does Jesus feed them from the few loaves and fish on hand; and much was left over. In effect Jesus is saying, "Don't wait on me to do what you yourselves can do. That is what living in the kingdom of God is like." The question of the kingdom's delay is misplaced. The disciples were empowered with the gospel by the Lord of the harvest; nothing more is needed. But Luke also issues a warning: Do not be deceived by a misplaced "joy" in your own deeds. Let God do the harvesting—for it is God alone who raises the dead.