

# Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

## “THE BURDEN OF CAREER OR THE BLESSING OF CALLING?”

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

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9)**

**By Steven E. Albertin**

1After this the Lord appointed 70 others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2He 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. 3Go on your way. See I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ 6And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7Remain 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. 8Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ 10But 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.’”

*Author's note: This pericope appears to be primarily focused on the mission of the church and those who have responsibility for its ministry. But if the mission belongs to the whole people of God and the 70 weren't just “professional church workers,” then*

*this pericope addresses everyone as they live out their lives in the places of home, community and workplace. This analysis assumes that the mission to which Jesus called the 70 was post-Pentecost and given to all the baptized. Proclaiming that “the kingdom of God has come near” means that we all have been called and sent on a mission dedicated to the care and redemption of the world. The problem is that this calling to serve the world gets perverted into the self-aggrandizing and burdensome pursuit of career. The solution is that in Jesus Christ career can be transformed into the blessing of a calling/vocation.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: “The Burden of Career”**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *“What have I gotten myself into?”*

Initially, the 70 were probably thrilled to be appointed by Jesus to their new positions. They may have thought that had received a great career opportunity to be part of this new thing Jesus was doing. But quickly it becomes obvious that this was something far bigger (“the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few”) and more dangerous (“lambs in the midst of wolves”) than they had ever anticipated. It doesn’t take too long for the honeymoon on the new job to rapidly come crashing to an end as they/we discover that the grass on the other side of the fence was not as green as we thought it was. The work load is too big. The time to profitability is too long. And the competition is too cut throat. The career that we thought would lead us to success and happiness becomes a burden.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *“What’s in it for me?”*

Jesus’ description of the mission of the 70 assumes that it wouldn’t take too much for them to be tempted to turn their

appointment to a calling to serve into a career focused on their own advancement. The 70's natural selfish inclination to only be concerned about their own perks gets reinforced by the impossible size of the harvest and the threats of the wolves. They turn inward. Their first impulse to ask "What's in it for me?" is anticipated by Jesus as he warns them against accumulating too much baggage, shopping for the best deal for themselves and not being too upset by the frequent rejections from those who could care less about their mission. And even when they do enjoy some success by defeating the demons, Jesus reminds them that their mission is not about their success. It is not about their fame and reputation. Jesus offers these warnings because he knows that the 70 and we are more likely to put our trust in our own success than the One who called us. It doesn't take much to turn what began as a calling to serve others into a career dedicated to our own self-promotion because we (and not God) are the only ones that matter.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – “You’re fired!”**

Donald Trump recently gained TV fame in his reality-based program “The Apprentice.” Through that program he has become famous for dumping overly ambitious but incompetent would-be business executives who want to be his “apprentice” with the now infamous phrase, “You’re fired!” Because God has appointed us to the 70 and given us a calling, the stakes are high, ultimately and eternally high. When we turn that noble calling into a mere career, we are no better off than the poor souls who have rejected us. Rejecting the One who sent us is playing with fire. When we reject the One who gave us a calling and instead insist on turning it into a career, we too are playing with fire. We are in big trouble. The One who gave us the authority to tread on snakes and scorpions has withdrawn that authority and the protection that came with it. “You’re fired!” We are no longer his apprentices. The career we thought could give us so much,

became a deadly burden and has now left us standing alone in the unemployment line.

## **PROGNOSIS: “The Blessing of Calling”**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – “Rehired . . . Forever”**

The fired workers want their jobs back and pray for a recall notice. But the boss's ire must be satisfied. He is upset with the workers who were more worried about their careers than the good of the company. But amazingly the boss still loves the 70. He wants to give them a second chance. But in order to save face and honor his sense of justice, someone must pay. And miraculously the one who pays is not the uppity careerists who deserve to be fired but the boss himself who sends his Son to suffer the judgment they/we deserve. What a gloriously generous act of mercy! We don't pay. The boss pays for us and it costs him dearly, the sacrifice of his Son. Such a sacrifice satisfies the boss's desire for justification. His demand for justice is ended in the blood of his own Son. Such is the love of this boss for his workers!

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – “A Blessed Boldness”**

And the careerists who deserve eternal unemployment no longer are. They no longer have to live with the onus of having been fired. Instead they are rehired, permanently and eternally. The 70 have their names written in heaven forever. They will always belong and will never have a life without meaning, purpose and direction. They are sent back to their mission that now looks very different to them. It is no longer merely a career for their own self-fulfillment. Now it is their calling issued from the Creator of the universe to join him in the care and redemption of the universe. There is no more grand or important work in the world. No longer intimidated by the size of the

harvest or frightened by the wolves snapping at their heels, no longer worried about career advancement and climbing the ladder of self promotion, they/we are free. Our mission is no longer the burden of a career but the blessing of a calling. We can be sure now that our work is no longer a mere career choice but a calling authorized by almighty God himself. And with God on our side, we have nothing to fear, nothing to worry about, nothing to lose. And our calling regardless of how it may seem insignificant and meaningless in this bottom line driven world will always be of ultimate value and significance. Why? Because of the One who has called us to this work is of ultimate value and significance.

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – “Beyond the Bottom Line”**

Confident that they have a calling and not just a career, authorized by the only One who matters, the Father and we can be sure that God is on our side and that is all we need. Therefore, we are freed from having to worry about the bottom line. Instead we get to travel through this world lightly, no longer worried about having to accumulate a bunch of stuff. Rejection no longer devastates us. We no longer have to play games pitting people against each other in order to get the best deal. We don't need to be patted on the back for being able to get demons to submit to us. Being loved by God and certain that our name is written in the Book of heaven is all that matters. No longer driven by the bottom line, we are truly free to serve others and let them know that the Kingdom of God has come near in Jesus Christ. We can rejoice in our calling to live lives dedicated not to our careers but to the care and redemption of this world.