

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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Analysis by Ronald C. Neustadt

After this the Lord appointed seventy 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.' 16Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.

17The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" 18He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. 19See, I have

given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. 20Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

DIAGNOSIS: Off-Message

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Getting “Off-Message”*

It’s clear that, more than anything else, Jesus wants his message to get out and for people to receive it with joy. The message is, “The kingdom [reign] of God has come near to you” (v. 9). That’s good news, because this kingdom is not a reign of terror, but a reign of mercy. That’s what has come near: God ruling in mercy, offering forgiveness and healing. (That much is clear from the rest of Luke’s Gospel where Jesus announces, through his words and deeds, “the year of the Lord’s favor.”)

But there are obstacles. Jesus’ instructions to his disciples speak of potential barriers to that news getting out—barriers within both the disciples and within those to whom they are sent. Unless those obstacles are overcome, there will be no joy.

So what’s new? The obstacles are still there, are they not? Message proclaimers (that’s us) still get rejected along with the message we deliver. That is, hearers still often prefer a different message—a message of justice, perhaps, or of moralism, or of self-reliance—a “gospel with some teeth in it.”

And we message proclaimers are sometimes still more concerned about purse and bag and sandals (a.k.a. the financial statement, the building, the future of the institution, our “success” and our status as leaders of, or members of, growing religious organizations) than we are about the message. As a result,

instead of delivering Jesus' message, we sometimes deliver a different one.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Not Trusting the Message*

What's worse, the reason we get "off message" is that we don't necessarily believe Jesus' message in the first place. No wonder "purse and bag and sandals" sometimes matter more to us than the message that God prefers above all to show us mercy. It's because we trust that "purse and bag and sandals" are what will see us through life. So we (like the priest and Levite in the following chapter) hesitate to let go of "purse and bag and sandals" for the sake of showing mercy, because we don't really believe that showing mercy (or even announcing it) has any future for us. In short, sometimes, we ourselves can be found among the rejecters.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Getting Shaken Off*

The trouble with rejecting the message of mercy is that we are thereby rejecting the One who sent us to deliver that message. We are rejecting the One who operates mercifully himself and who claims that he is doing so with authority from the One who sent him. Worse yet, rejecting him and the message he authorizes us to deliver (in word and deed) is rejecting the One who sent him. And that puts us at risk of God simply shaking off the dust and moving on to those who will rejoice in God's mercy (i.e. trust in it above all else and share it with others).

Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. What else can God do if we will not receive what God wants us to have?

PROGNOSIS: On-Message

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Joining Us in the Dust*

But look who bites the dust for us, all in order to go wherever

he must go-even to those who have died-in order to deliver the message that can bring life. Look who was rejected by everyone, even by those he had sent out to be messengers. Look who goes to them, too. Look who prays for their forgiveness. Look who cures their sickness. Look who dies rather than fail to deliver the message. And look how the One who sent him declares divine approval on the third day.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Renewing Our Faith*

If that doesn't get us to trust him and the One who sent him, nothing will. But, as it turns out, nothing else but the message is needed. The message has its own power. And through it God does create faith-again and again. God does it "again and again" because our old, dusty self keeps coming back and rejecting the promise. But the spirit that animated Jesus keeps breathing the message back into us and thereby keeps regenerating us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Staying "On-Message"*

When that Spirit creates (and re-creates) faith in us, it shows. We find ourselves able to accomplish things we never thought we could (and that, in fact, we never could, because we never had it in us in the first place). That is, we find ourselves bringing the kingdom (reign) of God to others. We find ourselves "staying on message," i.e. speaking God's Promise to others. We find ourselves operating by mercy, both in our speech and in our actions. We find ourselves bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to captives . . . and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor." And, in the process, the reign of Satan falls.