

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

LABORERS IN CHRIST'S HARVEST

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

1After 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: Few Laborers

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Losses and Risks*

The task of being truly missional is scary stuff. A first glance at the mission parameters seems a put-off: no solo acts, being susceptible to danger, without the concern for possessions, very likely a chance of rejection, and accepting the hospitality provided, however meager it may be. Any surprise that there are so few laborers? Who wants to engage in such a losing proposition?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Glorified Rewards*

Fear and resistance in the face of this missional challenge seems a realistic heart-problem. But the more subtle heart-problem diagnosed by the Authorizer who sent out the "seventy others," and who did go on this mission, is their returning vaunted claim of personal success. Notice how these seventy do not mention how others were helped or healed with the message they were sent out to bring; their excitement is how "even the demons submit to us" (v. 17). It's the "to us" that is so revealing. How is that much different from the claims we may hear in churches today, even by some of the most faithful workers (like us): "We are a friendly congregation!" "We have the best programs!" Even (stunningly, often phrased this way), "We worship X-number of people on Sunday!" The greatest danger to the hopeful message is how it is perverted into the "old" message of "do this, you will live" and have great success. This

is the modern-day false gospel and mission, the mission of glorified rewards (what's in it for me?) that appeals to the laborers, but misses out on living as the Authorizer's partners. Finally, it is the Authorizer himself who rejects this kind of joy (v. 20).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Rejection*

In fact, the real failure in the missional endeavor that hangs on to personal success is the failure to truly risk failing—rejection—something that the Authorizer for this mission seems to expect as par for the course. If it is his mission, it will probably lead to a cruciformed-reality. You mean, we have to lose? No thanks! But then, isn't that the same kind of rejection of which the Authorizer warned—not only the rejection of the Authorizer's agents, but the Authorizer himself, and more pointedly , “the one who sent me” (v. 16)? The real unforeseen danger—in all of our wrong-headed and wrong-hearted labors—is that we are finally the ones who get the feet wiped off as a protest against us. When there are only losers in truth who know they are losers, or losers in fact who are losers even when they think they are shining success stories, the bottom line is that losing is par for the course. And because we don't accept that, Woe is us! (see vv. 12-15 for a more complete rendition of these Woes—but see them for their gutsy meaning, Woe-is-us.)

PROGNOSIS: Plentiful Harvest

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Authorizer's Authority*

The real mercy in all of this is that the Authorizer is Jesus himself, who has a “new” way of dealing with woe-ful failures and losers like us. When it is emphasized that he himself is intending to go to the towns to which the thirty-five pairs are sent, he is not coming with a judgment of Woe, but with a message of “Peace to this house!” He comes visibly to all

through his own death on the cross, being the biggest loser for us all, the Lamb amidst the wolves of judgment, the One who suffers rejection for our sake. In fact, the whole missional activity is based on his “authority” of peace that transcends all woe—a peace which he freely bestows, so that among all other things, “nothing will hurt you” (v. 19). There is the freedom for losing. Wow! (Not Woe!)

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Rejoicing*

Further, the real heart-promising “joy” it is not in any victories along the way, but that our “names are written in heaven” (v. 20) by the One whom we confess as “Lord,” even and often in spite of our failing attempts. He has tread down the snakes and the scorpions and the power of the enemy, even watched him fall. But for us, there is the real victory that comes from placing our lots in Jesus’ losing, cruciform life and death and life again—our winning through his losing.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Go on Your Way!*

Only when so equipped with that authority can we delightfully take on the risk of the losing proposition which is his mission. God knows there are lots of losers out there. And we, chuckling in the midst of it, know we are among them. But that’s what makes us servants, paired up to get the message clear, so wonderfully taken up into all the wonderful and powerful joy of it all, with which the Lord of the harvest sends it out as truly good news: “Peace to this house!” “The kingdom of God is near!” There is no loser beyond the promise of Christ’s mission, and no region or loss we cannot venture.