

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

BRAGGING RIGHTS

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9)

By Cathy Lessmann

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.'" 16"Whoever 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 lightening. 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.”

Author's note: This pericope, focusing on verses 1-11, has been well “crossed” by Steve Albertin in a previous Sabbaththeology (<https://crossings.org/theology/2004/theolo454.shtml>). Therefore, this crossing will concentrate on the concluding verses, 16-20.

DIAGNOSIS: Abusing and Confusing Authority

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Thrilled with the Razzmatazz*

A few chapters earlier, Jesus had commissioned the 12 disciples to evangelize the tribes of Israel. Now, he broadens that mission by sending 70 followers out to the Gentile community (as suggested by the 70 nations of the world listed in Genesis 10). Jesus gives them his authority and wondrously, they are able to accomplish astounding things; they can even subdue demons! They're thrilled with their authority. Truly, it's something to brag about, and they expect all the razzle-dazzle will certainly draw crowds.

Many would-be evangelists today fall for the same misuse of Jesus' authority. Isn't it easier to attract crowds when one can demonstrate “answered prayers” with some awesome healings and, on top of that, guarantee material benefits?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Confused and Rejecting*

Jesus immediately has to give the 70 a corrective: “Do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (v. 20). As the 70 glory

in their amazing accomplishments, they betray their preference for a Jesus-who-steps-in-and-performs-miracles over the Jesus-who-brings-in-the-Kingdom (the forgiveness of sins). They are so mesmerized, maybe hoodwinked, by the grandiose potential to control spirits, that they downgrade (eventually reject) the more important authority, the authority to forgive sins.

Nowadays, we laborers betray that same confusion in subtle ways, for example, when we are astonished at the times God does not step in and work miracles on our behalf. Or, when we expect our worship to be entertaining and self-aggrandizing.

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

Jesus points out that “Whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (v. 16). Rejecting the Jesus-of-the-cross and preferring the miracle-working Jesus is the equivalent to rejecting “the one who sent me,” the One focused on forgiving sinners. Suddenly the laborers who had just been advised to shake the dust off their shoes when they are rejected, face the danger of being rejected otherwise—on a cosmic scale: After all, the One who sent Jesus, has the power to erase from the heavenly roster the (our) names of those who reject him.

PROGNOSIS: Vested Authority Invested

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Authority to Forgive Sins*

When Jesus sends the 70 out, he tells them to preach that “the Kingdom of God has come near” (v. 9). That turns out to be very good news for them too. Little did they realize (then) that Jesus will be their Kingdom bearer too; that Jesus’ game plan is to be “despised and rejected” in their stead. He is on his way to Jerusalem where he will take the blows for their cosmic rejection; and with that self-sacrificing act, he will re-enter their (our) names on the heavenly roster.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Authority Vested

Such forgiveness clarifies the potential confusion suffered by laborers serving Jesus (and so the One who sent him). They can marvel at the enormity of the gift of the Kingdom, and then marvel again that Jesus vests them with exactly the same authority he has: to be Jesus' stand-ins, lavishing forgiveness all around.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Authority Invested
Vested with the authority to forgive sins, laborers are energized and emboldened to go into the fields (v. 2) and do so joyfully, even while knowing there are wolves lying in wait. The laborers invest Jesus' marvelous authority in the fields around them, not intent on the final yield, but on the plants themselves. True, the work is tough, sometimes overwhelming, (they might even get crucified themselves), but they hang on Jesus' promise: "I have given you authority...over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you" (v. 19).