



disciples. Earlier the 12 were unable to help a boy plagued by demons and had even forbidden another to cast out demons in Jesus' name. Now these 70 new believers return from their mission on which their Lord had sent them and they not only encourage authority over demons they have power over them in the name of Jesus.

Yes, if the Gospel lesson in Luke says anything to us at all this morning it declares in a rather remarkable way that Jesus did not just send out 12 on a mission.

What is the significance of this for you and for me on this 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost in the church today? First of all, it's all about the number "70." Well, the Gospel writer knew well the number 70 is the biblical number of the nations of the world as they were counted in the Book of Genesis. The commissioning of the 70 foreshadows the mission of the church to the nations. Jesus' mission does not stop with the 12. Jesus' mission is carried on by the church, a church that creates community, cares for physical needs, proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom, and, yes, even has power over the demons of this world. Jesus did not just send out only 12 on a mission. Jesus sends you.

This Bible says today that right here, right now, in the reading and hearing of this Word of God this morning is all the nourishment, strength, and sustenance you need to overcome the demons of this world. Let me say it again. This Bible says today that right here, right now, in the reading and hearing of this Word of God this morning is all the nourishment, strength, and sustenance you need to overcome the demons of this world. You know these demons well. I'm not talking about goblins or evil spirits or a guy in a red suit with a forked tail. When the Scripture talks about demons, it is referring to those powers and authorities of this world that have a hold on you after you have shaken loose of the hold God has on your life. You see, if God doesn't hold you, you would be amazed what gets a hold of you. The demons of this world work on us all the time. In our consumer culture the pursuit of money and wealth

can consume you. In our culture that puts ultimate value on physical appearance, race, sex, nationality, and youth you lose all respect for people and for yourself. In our culture that figures a relationship is measured more in what you can get out of a person than what you can give, love is lost.

It was to a world such as this that Jesus sent out 70 others. And when they came back they cried,

*Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!*

Can you do it? Can Warwick Memorial Church, like the 70, accomplish things for Christ that even the 12 disciples couldn't? I have good news for you today—If I read the Gospel rightly this morning you have an advantage that even the 70 did not. The Gospel of Luke reports that Jesus sent the 70

*to every town and place where he himself intended to go.*

Jesus sent the 70 ahead of him to places he had not yet been.

Brothers and sisters, is it not true that after the resurrection, after Jesus ascended into heaven, you no longer go ahead of him that you might prepare for his coming—it is he who has already gone ahead of you preparing hearts, communities, and all creation for the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom you will bring? When you go on your mission you cannot go anywhere where your Lord has not already been.

When you meet a new family walking in the neighborhood and wonder whether you should ask them if they have a church, you will not be the first to tell them the name of Jesus as did the 70. Perhaps you will find they have already a part of a new community of faith and celebrate with them that connection. Or you may find that Jesus has already gone ahead of you having asked that same question of them over and over again so that your invitation might just be the moment when they decide, “You know, we’ve been thinking about bringing the kids to church.”

We are so often called upon in life to make decisions, difficult decisions, that affect not just ourselves but others as well. When you face these decisions it helps to know that your Lord has already been there, has already gone ahead of you preparing the way through the winding paths that result from the choice you make; indeed, bringing clarity and guidance in the decision itself because you know his name.

On the other hand, we become deeply affected so often by the choices of others, choices made within our families, among our friends, in our community or world; choices over which we have no control yet affect us in significant ways. In the face of the inevitable consequences of the choices of others on our lives we take heart in that Jesus, whose own fate was affected by the choice of others over which he indeed had ultimate control but chose to let it run its course, has already been there ahead of us. Through his suffering, death, and resurrection, there is no consequence that he has not already redeemed.

When the church seeks to witness to the cause of peace in a time of war, your voice is not a solitary one. It is the Prince of Peace who has already gone before you proclaiming the Gospel of peace bringing courage and hope to the witness you bring.

When you find yourself facing the death of a loved one or friend, as you hold her hand you do not support her in the midst of a hopeless situation, you share hope in the promise of the resurrection made possible by your Lord who has already been there ahead of her because she knows his name.

Yes, after the resurrection, after Jesus ascended into heaven, you have an advantage that even the 70 did not.

Can you do it?

Can you do it? Sisters and brothers, as Jesus sent the 70 so he sends you. Just like the 70 Jesus sends you with no special

provisions, no detailed map for your journey, just the simple instruction: whoever receives you share peace with them and enjoy their hospitality. Whoever does not receive you go on to another place. Jesus sends you and expects no particularly special abilities or exceptional skill on your part. You take nothing with you but the name of Jesus. At the name of Jesus demons flee—your demons, their demons, all the demons of this world flee, just run away in fear. You know it's not so much like magic, it's not really a matter of trying to remember to verbally say his name at every single moment of your ministry. No, it's more a matter of trust in him; it's a matter of relationship; it's exactly what happens when you step out as a disciple of Jesus and reach out in his name. You don't have to understand it, you don't have to know how Jesus works through you in that moment. All you have to do is know his name. As a matter of fact, if you follow the mission Christ has for you, all along the way they will be ready to hear just exactly what you say and receive just exactly what you share. That's what this ready harvest is all about. And the harvest needs all the laborers it can get.

All you have to do is go just like the 70: create community, care for physical needs, and proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom. At the word of the Gospel you bring, demons flee, for Christ has removed their power at the mere mention of his name.

In church today let God get a hold of you again and you never let go, leave your demons here as you kneel at our Lord's table, draw strength and sustenance to free others from their grip, and receive your commission to go where your Lord has already been to prepare for your coming. You see, Jesus did not just send out only 12. Jesus sends you.

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