

Sermon: The Kingdom of God Has Come Near

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, July 6, 2025)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The following exchange was reported in The Reader's Digest, as contributed by Warren K. Heyer: One day in library at the University of Montana, I saw the following bit of graffiti: "E=MC² — Albert Einstein." And directly underneath: "Very good, Albert, but next time show you process." And adding insult to this humour, a mark was then given, scribbled underneath: C+.

I find that tidbit fascinating. Here is the smartest person on earth, in the 20th century by far, the one who proposed the theory of relativity, who discovered the equation that governs the interaction between energy and matter, being asked to show his process. Like a third-grade student being asked by his math tutor: "Very good Albert, now show your process!"

I know, I know, it just a graffiti, just a student in the University of Montana having a bit of fun at the expense of Einstein. But it does illustrate a try and true principle in mathematics, and in my humble opinion, in life as well: process matters, not just the result.

Now if we apply this principle to the matter of faith, and if you agree with the result of our collective journey of faith is that 'the kingdom come, the will of God be done, on earth as it is in heaven'. Additionally, for those faithful servants God be commended, as recorded in Matthew 25:21, "*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*" What then, pray tell, is the process? What is the process that might offer us, as faithful servants of God, a guideline to follow to get to the desired end result?

Our Scripture reading this morning in Luke 10, the sending of the 72, contains precisely that. It starts with verse 1, "*After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.*" The connective phrase 'after this' refers to the immediate preceding context of chapter 9, where some were making excuses of why they couldn't follow Jesus when called upon by the Lord. "Lord, first let me go and bury my father," said one. Yet

another, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”

Discerning the reluctance in their hearts, Jesus says to them, “no one who puts a hand to the plow and look back is fit for the kingdom of God.” It is a stern warning to them, and to us as well, of keeping our eyes, our focus ahead, on the coming kingdom, where Jesus is leading and paving the way, the truth and the life.

If the passage in Luke 9 contains example of ‘what not to do’, then the following chapter in Luke 10 contains the opposite. In the manner of the sending of the 72, we find the work, the process of following Jesus Christ in this journey of faith. Allow me to summarize this process by five simple points: of ‘going in pairs’, of ‘travelling light’, of ‘bringing peace’, of ‘proclaiming kingdom’, and of ‘rejoicing always’.

Go in Pairs: It is amazing how God raises ordinary people to do extraordinary work. But in such work, the Lord God understands how treacherous the terrain could be, as Jesus himself said, “*I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.*” It stands to reason, except in certain limited occasions, God does not wish us to be alone.

Partnership in the journey of faith is good and desirable. Two by two Jesus sent out the 72. Partners support one another, encourage one another, and when need be, holds each other accountable.

I thank God for sending Daisy to be my partner in marriage and in serving the Lord. I still recall fondly how early on in our marriage, we debated over the finer points of the Scripture, and how to apply the fruits of those discussions to our life together. I remember when I stumbled, she was there to help me to get back on my feet. When I strayed, she was there to remind me of my own covenant with God. I can honestly say that without her, my call to ministry would’ve crumbled long ago.

I have also learned to lean on other spiritual partners while serving the church. They may have different ecclesiastical titles, such as elders, board of managers, committee conveners, Sunday school teachers, ministers etc. I call them co-workers, for that is what they are. They are co-working with me in the Kingdom of God, in serving the people of God.

I am not too picky about working only in pairs, or in tandem. There is no magical quality to the number two. The disciples of Jesus worked in pairs, in groups of three or four. They worked as a team for a common cause, a common goal. The important thing to remember is not to work alone, not to be alone.

Travel Light: Jesus instructed the 72 to ‘carry no purse, no bag, no sandals (which I take as no extra sandals), and greet no one on the road.’ The point that is conveyed here is to bring the minimally necessary material possession with you, when one is being sent out to do the work of God.

Material possessions, particularly money, have a corrupting influence on one’s mind. The more one has, the more one wants to have. The more one wants to have, the more one works to have it more. Eventually and inevitably, one forgets why and for what one works in the first place, as John Wesley was famously quoted, “When I have money, I get rid of it quickly, lest it find a way into my heart.”

Being sent out to work for the kingdom of God is an opportunity to experience God’s provision and providence. There is actually a biblical term for that —Jehovah Jireh— a Hebrew name which means “The Lord will provide”. It came out of the story of Abraham and Isaac in the book of Genesis, where the Lord God told Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering in Mount Moriah. Of course we know ultimately Abraham did not carry out that instruction, for the Lord held back his hand, and provided a ram as alternative. That story hinges on the trust that Abraham has placed in God. He may not have known how God might provide, but had trusted that God ultimately will. So travel light, and learn to trust in God.

Bring Peace: In the preceding chapter of Luke 9, when Jesus passed through Samaria on his way to Jerusalem, he was not received well by the inhabitants then. James and John, the disciples of Jesus, also known as the ‘Sons of Zebedee’ or ‘sons of thunder’, were quick to judge, quick to condemn. They asked Jesus, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” The fact they had the faith to call on heavenly fire was commendable, but their anger directed at the Samaritans was not. And Jesus rebuked them then—it’s a clear case of what not to do.

So here in Luke 10, in the sending of the seventy-two, Jesus gives specific instruction to pronounce peace, as in verse 5: *Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’*

Pronouncing peace, not simply as a greeting, not simply as conveying the absence of conflict. Pronouncing peace as shalom signifies wholeness, well-being, and completeness. It is, in essence a blessing, wishing someone a state of flourishing, harmony and reconciliation with their Creator.

Note that Jesus instructs his disciples to bless first, without judging whether someone may or may not be worthy. This is consistent with the Doctrine of Election formulated much later by the reformer John Calvin, that God chose unconditionally, not based on any merit but solely based on God's sovereign will and grace. So as in verse states, *"if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you."* The key point for the disciples being sent out to do this work, is not to pre-judge, not to judge at all, and leave all that judging business in God's hand.

Proclaim Kingdom: Other than pronouncing peace, the disciples of Jesus are to proclaim the nearness, the inevitability of the coming Kingdom. Two possible outcomes may transpire when entering into a household or a town: one positive, one negative.

On the positive side, as in verse 8-9, *"whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'.* It's wonderful! All good.

On the flip side, as in verse 10-11, *"but whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you'".* (This gesture of dusting off one's feet is not meant as a curse, but simply a demarcation separating from those who clearly do not wish to be blessed.) *"Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near."*

It is the same result, whether positive or negative, whether one receives or rejects the good news, the result is all the same: the kingdom of God has come near, is being proclaimed, and will soon be realized.

Rejoice Always: Rejoice over the process not the result. The Scripture informs us that the seventy-two returned with joy; they couldn't hide their exuberance, saying, "Lord, in your name, even the demons submit to us!" Beyond their wildest imagination, they had experienced first hand the power and authority granted to Jesus, the Son of God, to heal, to cure, and to cast out demonic spirits. It was an overwhelming success.

However, Jesus reminded them not to rejoice over the end result, but to rejoice in the process of being sent out, and to rejoice that their names are now written in heaven. And that is the joy awaiting us also. The kingdom of God has come near, so go in pair, travel light, bring peace, proclaim kingdom and rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, rejoice always.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**