

This Sunday's texts:  
Deuteronomy 7:7-9  
Acts 6:1-4  
Luke 10:1-11

**Chosen by God**  
**Pastor Jim Cords**  
**October 23, 2022**

The Holy Gospel according to Luke, the tenth chapter:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where He was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or a bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.'"

The Gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, open our hearts this day to your Holy Spirit that we might know whatever callings you put on our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Joe, I don't want to burst your bubble today, but I do want to point out that in the Old Testament, God communicates to His chosen people these words: "The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples."<sup>1</sup> It's not that you are better than the rest of us that God has called and set you apart for the ministry that you are embarking upon. It is because God needs workers in His vineyard. It is because God has chosen to have those who are set apart and gifted for the particular calling of ordained ministry. Today what I want us as a community of faith to understand is that while that calling, our [Pastor Cords and Joe's] calling is unique in terms of the ordained ministry, the calling of God is upon all of us. We all have a call in our lives that God would have us embark upon

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 7:7

as His witnesses. So we're going to move down that road today as we think about these texts.

But I want to first off address what may be very well going on in your hearts, as I know was going on in mine for most of my life. Who me? It's not because of who you are. It's because of who you worship. It's not because of what you can do, but what God can do through you. God simply needs you to be willing and open to His movement through your life into the life of the world.

It says this as that text goes on Deuteronomy: "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep His commandments."<sup>2</sup> God is faithful. When we seek to serve Him in our lives, it doesn't mean there aren't going to be lots of roadblocks, lots of struggles, lots of hardships, maybe even a bunch of accusations, some of which won't even be true. But God is faithful. So as we embark upon doing those things that God calls us to do, our confidence is in God. Our confidence is that He will be faithful, that He will work.

One of the things I often say, especially as I'm leaving church on a Sunday morning, is "Boy, I'm sure glad for what God does between my mouth and your ears." You have no idea what that is because you only hear what you hear, but I hear what's in my head, and sometimes it's not as helpful as what you hear in yours.

Sometimes when we think about discipleship, we think about disciples, our minds immediately go to the twelve or in this case, today, our minds to the ordained pastors, to the call. They're the ones that have a call, not us. So I think it's fascinating in the Gospel today that not only do we have earlier in the Gospel the sending out of the Twelve, but now Jesus called seventy-two others and He sends them out in His name.

One of the things I love about that sending is that Jesus sends them out to the villages that He's going to come to. So they understand "hey, it's there not your job to do the whole job. Understand that you're going ahead of Me. I'm going to come later and continue this work." Why is that helpful? It's helpful because He does the same for us. He follows up on the witness that we have to others. God is the one, through His Holy Spirit, who cultivates whatever seeds we're able to plant in the lives of others. We don't have to struggle so greatly with the idea of whether have we successfully convinced someone to follow Jesus. Highly unlikely. But more so has the Holy Spirit used our witness, used our vulnerability, used our honesty, used our sharing of what God is doing in our lives,

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 7:9

used the gifts that God has given us to serve them to open up their heart parts to receive Christ? Highly, highly likely. So, again, I'm suggesting that we, each one of us, are chosen by God and called to serve him using whatever gifts we have in our lives.

Very often, as I'm visiting older people who are less mobile, often struggling with the reality that they're able to do less in their lives than they used to do, maybe they've just recently given up the car keys, maybe they simply can't get around as well anymore, maybe they no longer have the influence of co-workers because they're not going out of their houses very often, they often say to me what do I have to give to God. To whom I say the faithful prayer accomplishes a great deal. Don't underestimate the power to be a Prayer Warrior for the life of your church, for your brothers and sisters in Christ, and for your pastors. Be praying and thinking and lifting up to God those elements. When you have an opportunity to visit with your children or grandchildren, don't be ashamed or scared or whatever might hold you back from sharing your faith, from sharing your journey. Thinking that maybe they don't care or they won't listen, just remember you're planting the seed that the Holy Spirit can use to bless their lives.

As we return to Acts 6, we see another movement in the life of the church. The church is growing and there's a problem. The problem is that there are both Hebrew and gentile Christians which means there are both Hebrew and Gentile widows. The Jews have known for a long time that they have a responsibility to their parents, to the elders among them to care for them, to provide for them, but they had a long history of really not caring about the Gentiles. And that's putting it mildly. So a group of Gentile Christians come to the apostles and say, "Hey, what's the deal? You're neglecting the Greek widows. You need to make this fair. You need to make this equitable." And the apostles are going, "Gosh, how do we deal with that?"

By the way, Joe, there are times every week when something comes in the office, on a phone call, or in an email and I think to myself, "Oh no, how are we going to deal with that?" and I find it rarely is the answer I need to do more. Rarely the answer is "Oh, I got to add that to my list of things I need to do." More often, the question is who in the community has God equipped, who in the community is God calling, so that the needs of the community can be met. In this case, they set apart seven Greek men to adjust and make sure that this distribution of food and care for the Greek widows is cared for. "Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our

attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”<sup>3</sup> We're going to keep doing our priorities, but we're going to make sure that this need gets met by turning over this responsibility to these seven leaders among you whom you choose, full of the Spirit and wisdom.

I've often looked at this text because very quickly it moves to the long sermon of all in chapter 7 of Acts, from Stephen, one of those Greeks who was chosen. I think to myself how much “Spirit and wisdom” do they need to do this job that they are set apart for. Well, maybe more than we think.

I happened to walk over Thursday morning to our FISH food pantry and was in conversation with the ladies over there. I found out that one of the things they are dealing with is how many tons of food they need to bring in each week to deal with the 75-plus families who come to our FISH food pantry, and when that food comes in, who hauls it in from the parking lot into the room, how do they sort it, and how do they store it. Let me tell you something. It is a work. It takes some wisdom. It takes some discernment. Those folks over there, especially the now two ladies in charge, they are awesome and they are wise and they are sharp and they have been set apart for that ministry. There are dozens of people who've been set apart to assist them in that ministry. It flows like clockwork, at least from the outside. You see I don't have to deal with all the little things that they have to fix. Almost every day, they get there to volunteer. They're sorting through little problems like all the rest of us to make sure things run smoothly. And God is blessing them in that work. People are being fed in this community. They're experiencing the love of God through that work, as God uses their wisdom and their abilities to bless others through them.

Something different happens in Acts. Stephen, one of the seven who is set aside to be this food distribution guru, ends up being a proclaimer of the Gospel. In the 7th chapter of Acts, we have one of them to the fullest stories of how God has been at work in the midst of His people in all of the New Testament. It goes all the way from Abraham and flows all the way through to the resurrection. He's doing that, proclaiming the Gospel, maybe as the first Gentile preacher. He's so effective that they get so mad that they stone him.

So I remind you. This calling to serve God is not always a comfortable calling. This calling to serve God, ... Joe, ... is not always without criticism, some are valid, some not. Like Stephen, in the midst of those challenges, and, like Stephen, in the midst of the challenges you face in your life doing those things that God is calling you to do, we trust in the power of God.

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 6:3

Now I know that Stephen becomes the first martyr as he is stoned. I know that his proclamation took on even greater depth as he asked God to forgive those who are doing the stoning as they were doing it, following the example of Jesus who said on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”<sup>4</sup>

But I also know that something else happens. Listen as we read further. In Acts 8, it says, “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”<sup>5</sup> They were scattered because of the persecution. They ran away, if you will, to try to find a safe place for themselves and their families. That scattering is exactly what God used to get the Gospel proclaimed around the world. “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”<sup>6</sup>

As we continue into Acts, we find out that one of the places where they preached was Antioch. Antioch became the place where Christians were first called Christians. Antioch became the base of missionary journeys throughout the Greek-speaking world and in Greece and Rome. Paul and Barnabas are sent from that church for each of their missionary Journeys. God used Stephen, even in his martyrdom, to scatter the people, so that their proclamation of the Gospel would begin the proclamation of the Gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the Earth. It's happening regardless, or maybe even because of, the persecution that happens.

So when life gets tough, they say the tough get going. When our lives get tough, we don't back away from the Gospel. We step into it more fully, trusting more fully that God indeed will be at work, trusting more fully that even if we can't cultivate those seeds that are planted, God will. So we don't give up when what we see is hardship and struggle rather than fruitfulness. We continue to trust that God will bring about that fruitfulness, that the Gospel will continue to shine.

A part of what happens in our witness is when people see that we work through the struggle and continue to trust in God, they realize that in their own struggles, they too can continue to trust in God. It happens over and over that not what we intend to be our witness, but simply our very lives are witness for the Good News of the Gospel. It's because God has chosen and equipped us.

One of the verses that has been in my heart and soul for a very long time comes from 1 Corinthians 12:7 and it says, “To each is given the manifestation of

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 23:34

<sup>5</sup> Acts 8:1

<sup>6</sup> Acts 8:4

the Spirit for the common good.”<sup>7</sup> God will show up in each of our lives to bless others. That's His promise.

In several conversations in the last week, as we've been talking about the SOAP verses, one of the questions has been “Gosh, the Holy Spirit seems to be so prominent in these verses in Acts. Why isn't the Holy Spirit as prominent in my life?” In the midst of those conversations, one of your brothers or sisters in Christ said this, “I'm not always sure I sense the Holy Spirit, but God promised that I have the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit is always with me, and I'm confident in God's promise whether I see it or not.” She goes on to say, “As I've begun to believe that more fully, I've begun to see it more.” See the hand of God at work in the midst of us, as we look for His work in and through us. So brothers and sisters in Christ, in our calling as St Timothy's Lutheran Church, to be a faithful witness to God in this community, Joe in your calling and setting apart as a pastor in this greater church as well as this congregation, be strong and courageous because God is with you. Brothers and sisters in Christ, whatever your witness, whether you view it to be something large or something small, be strong and courageous, confident in God's promise to do what He says He will do - gift you, manifest His Spirit in your life to bless others. You, brothers and sisters in Christ, are blessed and are a blessing. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7, ESV