

Luke 10:1-20 (10:1-12, 17-20 is the gospel reading)

¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy (-two) others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. ² He said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. ³ Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. ⁵ Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this household. ⁶ If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you, for the laborer deserves his payment. Do not move about from one house to another. ⁸ Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, ⁹ cure the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand for you.’ ¹⁰ Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say, ¹¹ ‘The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.’ Yet know this: the kingdom of God is at hand. ¹² I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for that town.

[not part of the Sunday gospel: ¹³ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵ And as for you, Capernaum, ‘Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the netherworld.’” ¹⁶ Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”]

¹⁷ The seventy (-two) returned rejoicing, and said, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name.” ¹⁸ Jesus said, “I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you the power ‘to tread upon serpents’ and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

Condemnation or Lamentation? Quite noticeably, the Sunday gospel passes over vv.13-16, sayings that are difficult in themselves, and certainly present larger homiletic challenges for a Sunday morning. In our English-language hearing of the “woe to you” expressions, we are conditioned to understand the phrase as a condemnation, or at least as “unless you change your ways, the curses promised by the condemnations will come upon you.” Especially in the context of these verses, condemnation is held up as a very real possibility when all things come to judgment. The question I would pose is this: what is the tone of the expression’s use. Is it condemnatory? Or is there another viable linguistic alternative.

The expression “woe to you” is written in the Greek as “*ouai soi*.” The word *soi* is straight forward and means “to you.” The word “*ouai*” is a bit more interesting. Most scholars hold that the Greek is really a Semitism used as an interjection expressing pain, lament, and especially a threat in 41 NT passages. [EDNT, 540]. The Semitism is not that unfamiliar to us. We have all heard the expression “oy vey” – the ethnically Jewish way to react when you find out how much your son’s root canal will cost, or when you find out that there is a two-hour wait time for a table at the restaurant where you just arrived. [Chabad.org] Oy and vey are two very old Jewish interjections which both mean “woe.” Oy is found many times in the Bible (see Numbers 21:29, 1 Samuel 4:7 and Isaiah 3:11 for a few examples). Vey is newer than oy; it is oy’s Aramaic equivalent. But at their root meaning, they are also expressions of pain and lament.

Why could this be important? I think it is because of the manner/tone we assign to Jesus as he says these words. I think we are prone and conditioned to assign Jesus the manner/tone of a street corner preacher call down the wrath of God on sinners. But that is not consistent with Jesus or the deeper meaning of the text. What is more consistent with Jesus’ manner and mission, is that he is lamenting the current state of things. Bethsaida and Chorazin were witnesses to the mercy and mission of Jesus, and yet remain unrepentant. Should they remain this way, it will not go well for them. And that is lamentable. Oy vey!

Mission. I have often wondered if this passage also presents a deeper difficulty in the sense that some people have the idea that “mission” is part of the realm of the “professionals” in the church. The Franciscans were the first religious order to have a specifically missionary charism in our rule of life. And that is good, but does it allow admirers of St. Francis to stay on the side line and let “the professionals” take care of mission? I would offer that this passage calls on all disciples to be part of mission.

R. Allen Culpepper holds that this passage contains 10 principles of mission by which every generation should be guided:

1. affirms the world’s need for mission
2. points to the importance of prayer in and in support of mission
3. insists on the active participation of every disciple
4. warns of the realistic dangers, barriers and uncertainty of mission
5. singularity of purpose
6. the goal of mission: peace upon this household
7. the host sets the context for the missionary’s witness
8. recognition that mission and witness will not always succeed
9. nevertheless, perseverance is the hallmark of mission
10. despite the evidence or no, be assured about the ultimate fulfillment of God’s redemptive mission. This ultimate fulfillment, even if we are unsuccessful – this is why we rejoice.

On a more lighthearted note, among Franciscans we might wonder why St. Francis chose Luke 10:4 (and parallels) as the “marching orders” for our life. It would be a little more interesting if we also took on Luke 22:36. Then we would have a bag, a purse, and swords!

Context. Our gospel reading follows immediately on the heels of Jesus moving from Galilee with the intention of reaching Jerusalem (9:53). He is rejected in the towns of Samaria (vv.51-56) and he challenges the would-be disciples (vv. 57-62). Following so quickly after the Transfiguration and prediction of his own passion, death, and resurrection, these scenes, taken together, all point to the coming dangers for aspiring disciples. Each scene brings the disciples’ understandings and expectations into contrast with Jesus’ own mission for the disciples. Discipleship is radical, calling for the unconditional commitment to the redemptive working of God, and to understand that God’s Kingdom has the highest priority and largest claim on one’s life. It is at this point that the 72 disciples are commissioned.

Commentary

Appointing and Instructing the Missioners

¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy (-two) others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. Just prior to sending out these “apostles” (the related verb *apostello* is used in vv. 1, 3, & 16), James and John indicate their inadequacies by wanting to call down fire to destroy the Samaritans and three “would-be” followers indicate their unwillingness to leave all to follow Jesus. Yet, in spite of these shortcomings among his followers, Jesus sends them out.

Only the Gospel of Luke contains two episodes in which Jesus sends out his followers on a mission: the first (Luke 9:1–6) recounts the sending out of the Twelve; here in Luke 10:1–12 a similar report based is the sending out of seventy-two (seventy in many manuscripts) in this gospel. The narrative continues the

theme of Jesus preparing witnesses to himself and his ministry. These witnesses include not only the Twelve but also the seventy-two. Note that the instructions given to the Twelve and to the seventy-two are similar and that what is said to the seventy-two in Luke 10:4 is directed to the Twelve in Luke 22:35.

As mentioned, only Luke among the evangelists tells of this second mission of disciples (*cf.* 9:1-6 for the first sending). “Luke provides no geographical setting for the mission of the seventy-two, and there is no reason to expect that Jesus’ envoys participate at this juncture in a mission to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, in other ways Luke uses this scene to prepare for and anticipate a mission that is in the process of expanding beyond the land of the Jews. This is suggested by the number of important parallels between the sending of the seventy-two and the mission ‘to the end of the earth’ as it is portrayed in Acts—for example, the thread that runs from the mission of John to the mission of the seventy-two to the mission of Jesus’ followers in Acts, as well as the parallels between the forms of ministry (‘in the name of Jesus’) and anticipated reception of the seventy-two and their counterparts in Acts. In indirect and figurative ways, too, this narrative unit points to the wider mission. The appointment of the seventy-two portends in a symbolic way a concern for all the peoples of the world. Moreover, the rejection of Jesus and his message among Galilean towns, set against the claim that a mission oriented toward Gentile settings would certainly have produced repentance, raises the prospect of opportunities for response to the good news outside the land of the Jews.” [Green, 410-11]

The disciples are to go “*ahead of him,*” therefore not announcing themselves or their own message, but preparing the way for Jesus. This is the continuing charge of Christian preachers. The missionaries are sent in twos in order to give a witness that can be considered formal testimony about Jesus and the reign of God (see Matt 18:16). In the readers’ setting (both in Luke’s day and in ours), is it the disciples calling to prepare the people for the (second) coming of Jesus? How do we do that? Actually, it would seem that the apostles in these verses do it by proclaiming (in words and actions) the Kingdom of God as a present reality.

The Urgency of the Harvest and Risk of Mission

² *He said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. ³ Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way.* The prophets of the OT used harvest as a metaphor for eschatological judgment and for the gathering of Israel in the last times (Joel 3:13; Mic 4:11–13). In every culture, harvest season is a time of great urgency. The common day laborer would understand the exhortation to plead with the landowner to bring in more laborers to help with the harvest. In the context of the parable of the sower and the seed earlier (8:4–8), it is now time to gather in the harvest from the soil that has produced a hundredfold. [Culpepper, 219]

Again, there is no room for illusion. The disciples will be lambs among wolves, defenseless, completely dependent on the Lord of the harvest for whatever is needed (Isa 11:6; 65:25). The metaphor warns the disciples of the opposition they will encounter. Unlike Matthew (10:16), Luke does not give any instruction as to how the disciples should prepare for or respond to the opposition they will encounter, unless the instructions that follow are understood as following from this warning. The simile points both to danger and to helplessness. God’s servants are always in some sense at the mercy of the world, and their own strength is inadequate. They must depend upon God. So Jesus tells them to take no equipment (*cf.* 9:3).

Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. The command neither to carry sandals (*hypodēmata*) nor to greet (*aspasēsthe*) certainly amplify the sense of urgency about mission. Most scholars see the echo of both the Mosaic and the Elisha tradition, where the theme of urgency is evident. In Exod. 12:11 the Israelites were commanded to eat their first Passover with their sandals on their feet, and in 2 Kings 4:29 Elisha sent Gehazi on his way with this command: “If you meet anyone,

ouk eulogēseis auton [‘give him no greeting’].” *Greet no one along the way* is not an exhortation to impoliteness: it is a reminder that their business is urgent and that they are not to delay it with wayside acquaintances. The traditions of the near eastern make road side encounters, however hospitable and gracious, are elaborate and time-consuming. These traditions highlight the point of Jesus’ commands, as the eschatological urgency of his ministry surpasses that of the first Passover, and the command not to offer greetings reflects the same concerns.

“Peace to this household...”

The instructions for how the disciples should receive hospitality are expanded from 9:4, which simply commanded that they stay wherever they were received. Here the instruction has two parts, with commentary on each: (1) say, “Peace to this house,” and (2) remain in the house where you are received. The peace they offer seems like a tangible gift or even a living reality with a mind of its own. This notion of peace rests on the biblical concept of the word of God as being not only a message but somehow an embodiment of God’s own personality and power (Isa 55:10–11; Jer 20:8–9). The peace-wish of the Christian missionary is more than an expression of good will — it is the offer of a gift from God of which they are privileged to be the ministers and heralds (see 1:2; Acts 6:4). Those who bring spiritual gifts can expect their physical needs to be taken care of by the beneficiaries (v. 7; see Gal 6:6 “*the one who is being instructed in the Word should share all good things with his instructor.*”).

The Twelve were to remain in the one house in any one town (9:4) and this applies to the seventy also. They are to have no compunction about receiving their meals free, for *the laborer deserves his payment* (cf. 1 Tim. 5:18). This is a principle of wide application that has sometimes been overlooked in Christian activities. But if the laborer is worth his wages he is not worth more. The disciples are not to go *from house to another*. That would mean engaging in a social round and being entertained long after they have done their work. There is an urgency about their mission. They must press on.

When the preachers are welcomed they are to accept hospitality, eating what is put in front of them. In the area beyond Jordan to which they were apparently going there were many Gentiles and the food offered might not always satisfy the rigorist for ceremonial purity. They were not to be sidetracked into meticulousness about food and food laws. They were to heal and to preach, the content of their message being that the *kingdom of God is at hand*.

Three instructions are given regarding the conduct of the mission in each village: (1) Eat what is provided, (2) heal the sick (cf. Matt 10:8), and (3) announce the kingdom. The three facets of the mission encompass the creation of community (table fellowship), care of physical needs, and proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom. The disciples, therefore, were charged to continue the three facets of Jesus’ work in Galilee.

The Woes of the Impenitent

Because the proclamation of the gospel is the word of God, it is not to be treated as a merely human message — “take it or leave it.” In rejecting the preachers they were not simply rejecting a couple of poor itinerants, but the very kingdom of God, and that has serious consequences for closing ears and hearts to the news of God’s reign - the people have drawn down judgment on themselves

Jesus makes drastic comparisons for the obstinate cities of Galilee where he centered much of his ministry. Chorazin and Bethsaida will be no better off than Sodom. And proud Capernaum, Jesus’ “headquarters” in Galilee, has learned nothing from the Jewish heritage that was preparing for the coming of the Messiah. Tyre and Sidon, Gentile cities, would have been able to read the signs that Capernaum overlooked. The conclusion of the instruction is a reminder of the deeper dimension of the mission: the disciples are bringing Jesus and the Father to their listeners.

The Return of the Seventy-two

On their return, the seventy-two are amazed at the power that has been given them through the name of Jesus. They have driven out demons, furthering Jesus' attack on Satan's dominion in this world. Jesus envisions Satan falling from the sky through their ministry, another way of saying that the eschatological or final battle between good and evil is taking place now; the victory is being won in Jesus' name (John 12:31; Rom 16:20). But the disciples must not lose their perspective. The prize is not human glory through feats of power but heavenly glory through following Jesus to Jerusalem, to Calvary.

Notes

Luke 10:1–12 Only the Gospel of Luke contains two episodes in which Jesus sends out his followers on a mission: the first (Luke 10:1–6) is based on the mission in Mark 6:6b–13 and recounts the sending out of the Twelve; here in Luke 10:1–12 a similar report based on Q becomes the sending out of seventy-two in this gospel. The episode continues the theme of Jesus preparing witnesses to himself and his ministry. These witnesses include not only the Twelve but also the seventy-two who may represent the Christian mission in Luke's own day. Note that the instructions given to the Twelve and to the seventy-two are similar and that what is said to the seventy-two in Luke 10:4 is directed to the Twelve in Luke 22:35.

Luke 10:1 *seventy[-two]*: One of the most difficult textual problems in the New Testament is the number of people Jesus sent out on this mission. The inclusion of *dyo* ("two") is supported by major Alexandrian and Western witnesses (P⁷⁵ B D), but its omission is also attested by significant manuscripts (⌘ A C L W Θ Ξ Ψ^f.¹³) – in other words, many good manuscripts read 'seventy,' but there are many also that read 'seventy-two'. With the evidence at our disposal certainty is impossible.

Two major conceptual parallels have been suggested, but neither one settles this textual issue. First, in light of the possible allusion to Num. 11 in 9:49–50, also conceivable is an allusion to Num. 11:16–30, where Moses is told to choose seventy (or seventy-two if Eldad and Medad are included) elders "so that they shall bear the burden of the people along with [Moses]" (11:17). This interpretation is strengthened by Luke's portrayal of Jesus as the prophet like Moses elsewhere (9:35; Acts 3:22; 7:37). They see Jesus as the second Moses. Others think of the seventy members of the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders who should have been preparing for the coming of the Messiah.

The second possible allusion is to the list of nations in Gen. 10–11, where the Hebrew text has seventy while the LXX has seventy-two. For those who see Gen. 10–11 as the framework for the interpretation of Jesus' commissioning of the seventy(-two), the foreshadowing of the coming mission of the Gentiles is the primary point of Luke 10. The reference to seventy-two princes in the world in 3 *En.* (17:8; 18:2–3; 30:2) and the seventy-two translators of the LXX for the pagan world (*Let. Aris.* 35–51) may likewise reflect the use of this number as a reference to the Gentile world. Both Num. 11 and Gen. 10–11 point to the significance of 10:1–16 for Luke's second volume, while various other possible allusions behind the number seventy(-two) could be further identified.

Whatever the truth behind these conjectures, Jesus sent the disciples ahead of him in pairs.

Luke 10:3 *lambs among wolves*: Reading the metaphor of *arnas en mesō lykōn* (lit., "lambs in the midst of wolves") in its wider context, where the eschatological significance of this commissioning is noted (cf. 10:17–20), suggests an allusion to Isa. 11:6: *symboskēthēsetai lykos meta arnos* ("the wolf shall feed with the lamb") (cf. Isa. 65:25). In the immediate context, however, divine protection in the midst of hostility and rejection seems to be the focus, and the use of this "lamb/sheep" imagery is found already in the prophetic literature (Isa. 40:11; 53:7; Jer. 50:6–7; Ezek. 34; Mic. 2:12). The use of this metaphor for the theme of divine protection together with the mentioning of the seventy nations is found later in *Midr. Tanhuma Toldos* 5: "There is something great about the sheep [Israel] that can persist among 70 wolves [the nations]. He replied: Great is the Shepherd who delivers it and watches over it and destroys them [the wolves] before them [Israel]."

Luke 10:4 *Carry no money bag, no sack*: The “money bag” (*ballantion*, used by Luke only in the New Testament) is a coin purse. The “sack” (*pēra*) is a traveller’s bag.

...*greet no one along the way*: because of the urgency of the mission and the single-mindedness required of missionaries, attachment to material possessions should be avoided and even customary greetings should not distract from the fulfillment of the task.

Luke 10:5 *first say, “Peace to this household”*: The peace of which Luke’s gospel speaks (Luke 2:14; 7:50; 8:48; 10:5-6; 19:38, 42; 24:36) is more than the absence of war of the *pax Augusta*; it also includes the security and well-being characteristic of peace in the Old Testament. The greeting of peace is conceived of not merely as a salutation but as an effective word. If it finds no worthy recipient, it will return to the speaker.

Luke 10:6 *a peaceful person*: literally, “a son of peace.”

Luke 10:7 *the laborer deserves his payment*: This saying is well attested in the NT – Mt 10:10, 1 Cor 9:14, and 1 Tim 5:18

Luke 10:10 *cure the sick*: As in Luke 9:1-2, the preaching of the reign of God is signaled by the power to heal

Luke 10:11 *dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you*: this gesture indicates a complete disassociation from unbelievers

Luke 10:12 *that day*: “that day” is not explained, but it likely points to a dreadful day of judgment (cf. 21:34; Matt 7:22; 2 Thess 1:10; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:8). Then it will be *more tolerable ... for Sodom* than for the offenders. The destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19:13, 24f.; Isa 3:9; Ezek 16:48, 56) led to that city’s becoming proverbial for the judgment by God of wicked people (Dt 29:23; Isa 1:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6 – as well in the NT – Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6; Rom 9:29; and Luke 17:29). The guilt of those who rejected the messengers of God’s kingdom is emphasized by the allusion.

Luke 10:13 *Woe to you*: *Woe* is not a call for vengeance, but an expression of deep regret

Luke 10:13 *repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes*: The call to repentance that is a part of the proclamation of the kingdom brings with it a severe judgment for those who hear it and reject it. “Sackcloth and ashes” are often mentioned in contexts of mourning (Esther 4:1, 3; Jer. 6:26) and petition (Isa. 58:5; Dan. 9:3). This expression survives in Jewish traditions (cf. 1 Macc. 3:47; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.221; 20.123; *Jos. Asen.* 13:2; *T. Jos.* 15:2), although in the NT it appears only in this passage (and its parallel, Matt. 11:21).

Luke 10:13 *Chorazin*: Ancient Jewish sources describe it as a medium-sized town (*t. Mak.* 3:8) noted for its remarkable wheat production (*b. Menah.* 85a). Eusebius and Jerome the ruins of the town 2 mi north of Capernaum. C. W. M. Van de Velde’s identification of Khirbet Karazeh as ancient Chorazin in the 1850s has been generally accepted. *Bethsaida* is on the north end of Lake Gennesaret east of the mouth of the Jordan.

Luke 10:14 *Tyre and Sidon*: The NT frequently mentions the Phoenician city Tyre together with Sidon. In the OT Tyre and Sidon came to be cities condemned for their worship of foreign gods (Isa. 23; Ezek. 26–28; Joel 3:4–8; Amos 1:9–10). Their arrogance is best captured in Ezek. 28:2, where Tyre is described as claiming, “*I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas.*” It may be no coincidence that the following verse, concerning Capernaum (Luke 10:15), also focuses on the issue of pride.

Luke 10:15 *the netherworld*: the underworld, the place of the dead (Acts 2:27,31) here contrasted with heaven. The evocation of OT symbols of judgment and destruction continue with this verse, which contains an allusion to Isa. 14:13–15 in the prophetic oracle against Babylon: “*You said in your heart, ‘I*

will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God ... I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit." A similar pattern of thought is found in Ezek. 28:2–10. In Acts 12:22–23 the fall of King Herod is described in similar terms. What is striking is that warnings once directed against Israel's neighbors are now applied to Israel as they too refuse to acknowledge their God.

Luke 10:18 I have observed Satan fall like lightning: This is Luke's first use of the name Satan for the chide of the demons; he earlier used "the devil" (4:13; 8:12). The role of Satan as tester is established in the Book of Job. The effect of the mission of the seventy-two is characterized as a symbolic fall of Satan. As the kingdom of God is gradually being established, evil in all its forms is being defeated; the dominion of Satan over humanity is at an end.

The fall of Satan draws on Isa. 14:12 which seems to have used ancient Near Eastern mythic language in portraying the downfall of Babylon. Jesus' use of similar language to apply to Satan may recall the background behind Isaiah's language. Jewish interpretive traditions also apply Isa. 14:12 to the fall of Satan/Lucifer (2 En. 29:3; L.A.E. 12:1). In the Qumran documents the fall of the evil one is accompanied by the exaltation of the righteous in cosmic battles (cf. 11Q13).

Luke 10:19 snakes and scorpions: The pairing of *opheōn kai skorpiōn* ("snakes and scorpions") may allude to *ophis daknōn kai skorpios* ("biting snakes and scorpions") in Deut. 8:15, where God's protection of Israel in the wilderness is noted. AS well it may be a reference back to Ps. 91:13. Deut. 8 and Ps. 91 have already appeared together in the Lucan temptation narrative (4:4, 11–12) and in 10:19 Luke may have alluded to both texts in reference to the promise of divine protection.

Luke 10:20 names are written in heaven: The idea of a heavenly book in which the names and deeds of the righteous are recorded is found in Ex 32:32–33; Ps 69:28; Ps 138:16, Phil 4:3, Heb 12:24, Rev 3:5. Luke also has similar ideas "merit in heaven" (6:3) and "treasures in heaven" (12:33; 18:22)

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