

Luke 10:1-20

Pentecost 4 + Proper 9C + July 7, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
Reason for Rejoicing

The Word of the Lord from Luke 10:20: Jesus said, “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Jesus sends 72 to prepare the way for Him. We don't know much about them. We have no record of their names, but their names aren't important: Jesus, whose way they prepare, is the one who matters.

So they don't have names. They don't have much to carry, either: they've been told to take no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals. As they go forth, they do so by faith that the Lord will provide for them along the way, providing sons of peace who will open their homes to them.

No names. No luggage. No evident protection, either: Jesus tells them, “I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.” And while many will welcome them, many will reject them too. When that happens, they're to wipe the dust off their feet and continue on their way. The judgment of those who reject them belongs not to them, but to the One who sends them.

No names, no luggage, no permission to fight back. So what *does* the Lord send with them? His Word. And with His Word comes His authority to do what He would have them do.

So He tells them, “Heal the sick.” How? By speaking. Imagine: two strangers walk into a village. They find one who is blind or lame or fevered; they say, “In the name of Jesus, be well;” and the afflicted one is instantly healed. They're not famous doctors, but nameless laborers. They didn't pull a potion out of a bag: they don't have a bag. But they speak God's Word; and to make that clear, they tell the one who has been healed, “The Kingdom of God has come near to you.” The King Himself is on His way in the flesh, but He and His kingdom are already present there, healing and making whole by that holy Word.

That's what the 72 do with the Word of Jesus, and more! When they return to Jesus, they joyfully say, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!” Healing diseases by speaking is a wonder, of course. To command demons away is more astounding yet; yet the seventy-two have been able to cast them out *merely by speaking*.

Jesus confirms this to be true. He says, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” That's a fascinating statement. You find Satan still in heaven a couple of times in the Old Testament: in Job 1 and Zechariah 3, he stands before God and accuses believers, saying things like, “God, You can't possibly keep the likes of Job or the high priest Joshua around, because they are far too unholy to be with You!” That's what Satan does – it's why he's called the devil, which means “accuser.” But while Satan is accusing God's people in the Old Testament, Jesus now declares that he has fallen from heaven – fallen fast like lightning, like he's been thrown out with force. What's happened? The Son of God has come and set His face toward Jerusalem, to die for the sins of the world. His suffering and death will satisfy God's wrath for man's sin, so Satan's got no accusations left. The Messiah cannot be stopped, and so the people of God are righteous before Him even now.

It's quite a text. The 72 take nothing with them except the Word of the Lord, and by that Word they can heal the sick and cast out demons. But lest they get the wrong idea, Jesus quickly reminds them that the power is not in them, but in Him and His Word; and far better than their ability to cast out demons is this: His Word saves *them*, too. "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you," He says, "but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." We don't know the names of the 72, but God does. They are His, because He has said so in His Word.

The Lord gives you His Word. It's the same Word that He gave to those 72 He sent out to prepare the way, and He still even sends out pastors to prepare the way by speaking it. It's His Word, and His Word is powerful, life-giving stuff.

What's His Word good for? It's good for the forgiveness of sins. That is no small thing at all.

If your sins are still bound to you, then you're cut off from God. But if you are forgiven, then you're a holy child of God, confident of His love and mercy forever. How does the Lord forgive your sins? By means of His holy Word, whether spoken, or added to water in Baptism, or bread and wine in His Holy Supper.

That Word of forgiveness also delivers healing, just as it did in our text. You may not see it yet, but the Lord declares that He will raise you up fully healed and fully restored on the Last Day. In body, mind and soul, you will be better for eternity than you ever have been, because you will be delivered from the curse of sin and its ravages upon you. Why? Because the Lord forgives you. Apart from forgiveness, your future is corruption, death and decay. With forgiveness, you have eternal life and healing. And how does the Lord deliver that forgiveness to you? By His Word.

That Word of forgiveness drives demons away. You're no match for the devil – he knows all the tricks and he'll have you sinning before you know it. And since he's been cast out of heaven and doesn't have the privilege of accusing you before God anymore, he spends his time accusing you before *you* instead. As long as you're sinful, the devil can sink in his hooks and whisper to your conscience that you're not right with God. But what does forgiveness do? It takes away those sins, and Satan has nothing to hook onto. If your sins are gone, he's got nothing left to accuse you with. Before the Word of Jesus which forgives your sins, he's got no choice but to flee.

Today, as in our text, the Word of Jesus has the same power to forgive sins, heal sickness and drive away the devil; and what's more, He provides His Word so abundantly! It is given to be the content of every worship service here, in what we say and hear and chant and sing. It is given to you to read daily at home. It is given to speak to family and friends, to speak to your children and your children's children. Make no mistake: when you speak the Word of the Lord, for example, to your kids at the dinner table or during a bedtime Bible story, the Lord is at work in that Word to give forgiveness and eternal healing to your kids. He is at work to drive the devil away from your kids, and the devil is hard at work to get your kids to forsake the Christian faith.

Now, if the devil is no match for the Lord's Word, then his strategy is entirely predictable: he's going to tempt you from the Word of God so that you don't hear it or meditate upon it.

Beware the temptation to helplessness and a feeling of despair. There's plenty to make you feel helpless these days, whether it be the lawlessness of society or the frightening diagnosis or the loved one who won't listen and repent. It's frustrating to beat your head against the wall

and feel like you're getting nowhere. Christians are lambs in a world of wolves, and being a lamb doesn't sit well with us because it involves so much trust and so little power. As we watch the world fall apart, the common question of Christians is "What can we *do*?"

First and foremost, the answer is that what we do is hear God's Word, and then we speak it. We speak it to Him in prayer. We speak to all who will hear, calling them to repentance so that they might be forgiven and delivered from death and devil. This doesn't mean that everyone will listen: the 72 faced their share of villages that didn't want Jesus. This speaking doesn't keep the world from falling apart, because Jesus has already declared that this world is going to fall apart. But that Word gives forgiveness and life to all who believe, and that's what Jesus first and foremost calls Christians to do. (That's not *all* Christians do, of course: the Word strengthens faith, and faith is always active in love and good works.)

Beware the temptation to neglect God's Word. The devil will use everything to distract you from it. He will use the possessions God has given you, the happiest moments, the worst days, commitments to work or sports or music, the latest YouTube sensation or phone app, all the things that just *have to* get done today in order to get you to neglect forgiveness, salvation and deliverance from hell. It is astonishingly easy to think, "I've been to church today, so I've gotten enough Gospel for the week," as if the devil only drops by to tempt you on Saturday nights or something. Beware: you do not sense this danger well enough, and you do not treasure God's live-giving Word near enough.

And yet, God keeps pouring it out upon you abundantly anyway. He pours out His Law upon you – not to leave you condemned for your sin, but to point you to Christ who has died for your sins. He pours out His Gospel upon you; and by that announcement of grace for the sake of Jesus, He forgives your sins. He gives you eternal life and eternal healing. He makes you His own and announces to the devil, "Back off, Satan. This one is Mine, washed in the blood of My Son."

He also says to you, "Rejoice, for your name is written in heaven." He said it at your baptism, and that's far better than seeing miraculous healings or demons sent away, because you won't always get to see those things. But if your name is written in the Lamb's book of life, then you're certain that you are God's beloved child.

Even when the world is falling apart, you know that heaven is yours.

Even when the devil accuses you with your most shameful sin, you still have Jesus' Word that He died for that one too.

Even in the midst of death, you have abundant life.

Whatever else the Lord gives you, always give thanks that He has given you His Word. Where the Word is, Jesus – the Word made flesh – is. Where the King is, there is His kingdom and you are part of it. Though the devil rages and the world falls, rejoice in this: your name is written in heaven, and the kingdom of God is yours.

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