

The Mission Has a Church

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

2nd in a six-week series

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Luke 9:1–6 (CEB)

Jesus called the Twelve together and he gave them power and authority over all demons and to heal sicknesses. ²He sent them out to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal the sick. ³He told them, "Take nothing for the journey—no walking stick, no bag, no bread, no money, not even an extra shirt. ⁴Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. ⁵Wherever they don't welcome you, as you leave that city, shake the dust off your feet as a witness against them." ⁶They departed and went through the villages proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

Luke 10:1–12 (CEB)

After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. ²He said to them, "The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. ³Go! Be warned, though, that I'm sending you out as lambs among wolves. ⁴Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don't even greet anyone along the way. ⁵Whenever you enter a house, first say, 'May peace be on this house.' ⁶If anyone there shares God's peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you.

Acts 2:42–47 (CEB)

⁴²The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. ⁴³A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were united and shared everything. ⁴⁵They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. ⁴⁶Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. ⁴⁷They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

1 Thessalonians 1:8 (CEB)

⁸The message about the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place. The news about your faithfulness to God has spread so that we don't even need to mention it.

God's mission is the mission of his Church. It is that simple.

Last week, we focused on God's mission in this world, God's work to reconcile humanity to himself and restore his creation. This work has progressed like ripples in a pond. The ripples began with Abraham and moved outward to his family and descendants, becoming the people known as Israel. And then among Israel, a stone fell into the pond unlike any before or since. From this stone, this foundation stone, the ripples continued to flow ever outward.

The Scripture passages for this week reflect this progression. Jesus first sends out the twelve and then the seventy-two. Then the Holy Spirit arrives at Pentecost to form the believers into a church and empower them for their work. They settle into their new life in Jerusalem and new believers are added daily. The ripples keep coming. The Spirit sends apostles outward to spread yet more ripples and soon whole communities of believers sprang up around the Mediterranean. The community in Thessalonica was one such portion of this movement. And their example causes even more ripples to spread (1 Thess. 1:9 above). And so it has been for two millennia. The mission of the UMC is in keeping with these ripples: "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

It is the Church to whom God has entrusted this mission. We talk about the Church, a.k.a., the body of Christ, the church universal, the community of believers, the holy catholic (an old word meaning “universal”) church, the people of God, and so on. Yet, few topics in our faith are less well-understood or embraced than our proclamation that we are the Church. It is so tempting to see the Church, including our corner of it called St. Andrew, as a club or as a gathering of the like-minded. But that is not the truth. So, let’s go over the basics.

First, all those who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus have been given new life and make up his Church. We are new creations. We have been born anew. We have died with Christ and been raised with Christ.

Second, God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, has formed all the believers into a single, unified body: the Church. It is the Spirit who has called us to God. It is the Spirit who has formed us into the body of Christ.

Third, you can think of each local church, like St. Andrew, as a colony of God’s Church, an outpost of this reborn human race.

Fourth, as colonists, we have been given work to do by our sovereign Master. We have been made a part of our Creator’s mission. We are here for a reason. We have not been saved merely for our own sakes, but for the sake of the whole world. We are to make disciples, do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

Fifth, God does not leave us to pursue this work on our own. It is the Holy Spirit who opens the pages of Scripture to us, who pulls our hearts toward God and others, and who empowers us to build for God’s kingdom.

So . . . given these five points of classic Christian orthodoxy, the full dimensions of what it means to be the body of Christ become clearer. If we are Jesus’ body, who are his arms? If we are Jesus’ body, who are his feet? If we are Jesus’ body, who is his back?

It is we, the Church, of course. You and me and all those who confess that Jesus is Lord.

We are the arms of Jesus that hold the hurting. We are the feet of Jesus that deliver the Good News. We are Jesus’ back, lifting up the poor and the oppressed. It takes strong arms, swift feet, and a sturdy back. By grace, God strengthens us for this work. And in this work there is profound joy, peace, and contentment.

Our two-fold mission

We have to guard against our tendency to chop up our concept of mission. If we concern ourselves only with disciple-making and neglect those who lack even the basics of life, then how are we truly emulating Christ? But if we provide food and clothing, yet do not tell the person of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ, we are

God’s Colonies

For Paul and the early Christians, every new Christian community, every house church that they formed, was a colony of God’s kingdom. It was to be governed by God’s law. The members of the community were citizens of heaven. They were there to consolidate and extend God’s kingdom. They were there to be the light to the world and a witness to God’s love and ongoing work in the world.

The Christians who made up these communities were not merely people who had come together to do good work for others or to enjoy each other’s fellowship, though there was plenty of both. The Christians had been born of water and the Spirit (see John 3). They were the ones upon whom the ends of the ages had come (1 Corinthians 10:11). They stood at the very point in time at which God had broken into history in the person of Jesus. In Paul’s letters to these churches, he very often grabs them by the metaphorical collar, hoping to make them realize who they really are and who had brought them together.

ignoring what matters most. We are to proclaim and to feed. We are to teach and to clothe. Both, together, constitute living the mission. As we go from Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth, we go with a Bible in one hand and a hammer in the other.

We also have to make sure we don't see "mission" or "missions" as the work of a special department or agency or institution. God has pulled the Church into the accomplishment of his mission and none of us are left out. In his commentary on Luke, Alan Culpepper very helpfully sets out ten principles of mission embedded in the Luke 10:1-12 passage.¹

First, it affirms the world's need for the church's mission: "The harvest is plentiful."

There is more work to do than laborers to do it.

Second, Jesus' commission affirms the importance of prayer in support of the church's mission: "Ask the lord of the harvest."

Third, it insists on the active participation of each disciple: "Go on your way." The work of the church is not merely the calling of a select few. . . .

Fourth, Jesus' commission warns of the dangers believers will face and provides guidelines: "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." . . .

Fifth, Jesus calls for singularity of purpose: "Greet no one on the road."

Sixth, the commission specifies the purpose of the mission: "Say, 'Peace to this house' and 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" Disciples declare what God is doing and bring God's peace to whomever receives them. Share table fellowship with whomever receives you.

Seventh, the host, not the guest, sets the context for the disciple's witness: "Eat what is set before you." The disciples do not seek to dictate the menu or impose their own cultural background on others.

Eighth, Jesus' commission recognizes that the disciples will not always succeed: "[When] they do not welcome you..." Jesus knew that the disciples would meet resistance and rejection some of the time.

Ninth, Jesus admonished the disciples to persevere: Shake their dust from your feet.

Tenth, and finally, Jesus gives the disciples a word of assurance about the fulfillment of God's redemptive mission: "Know this: the kingdom of God has come near." . . .

A final word on the Church

It is easy to see the Church as merely as an instrument used by God to accomplish his purposes. But this would be a tragic mistake. We are made for the worship of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. As Simon Chan writes, "God made the world in order to make the church." The church does not consist of buildings, not even the beautiful sanctuaries such as our own. Rather, the church consists of all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. God had once dwelt in the temple of Jerusalem, but, beginning at Pentecost, God dwells in and among his people. It is the people of God themselves who are joined together in Christ, a new creation and new humanity, growing into a holy temple, the temple to which God has returned. What a remarkable claim we make, that God's very presence dwells in us, the church -- the people of God.

For more than thirty years, there has been a congregation called St. Andrew in the holy, catholic church. We have been on a journey, understanding that God created us to be his. We are a large community and we have all the blessings and challenges that come with size, but we must never lose sight of the fact that we are not merely an organization. Rather, we, as the body of Christ, are the very presence of Christ.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Take a few minutes to look over the mission statement for the United Methodist Church. What words stick out to you? Why? Why do you think the UMC chose to add "for the transformation of the world," to the end of this statement? What does this phrase mean to you?

¹ Culpepper, R. A. (1994–2004). The Gospel of Luke. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 9, p. 222). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

2. When have you experienced a time when a church has had the expectation that people should come to the church, rather than a “go and make disciples” attitude? When have you struggled with these two concepts? When do you think it is easiest for us to fall into complacency in our mission as a church?
3. Sometimes, we focus on one part of the Great Commission or the United Methodist mission statement more than others. Which do you struggle with more, “Go,” or “make disciples”? Do you feel you are more gifted at one than the other? How can you begin to incorporate and balance both elements in your daily life?
4. Jesus sends his disciples out “in pairs” to follow this instruction that he gives. Why do you think he chooses to do this? What does this tell us about our own ministry? What does this tell us about the church as a whole?
5. How do you think we carry out our mission differently than the disciples do in Luke 10:1-12? Why do you think ministry is different in today’s culture? Is this challenging? Exciting? Why or why not?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: *More on the mission of God’s people*

Monday, Leviticus 19:9-18, 33-37 More than three millennia ago, God’s people were to look after strangers in their land.

Tuesday, Psalm 100:1-4 God’s people worship.

Wednesday, Acts 6:1-7 The church makes disciples.

Thursday, Acts 13 Paul begins his work of founding churches among the Gentiles.

Friday, 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 Paul urges the Corinthians to help to the poor believers in Jerusalem.

Saturday, 1 Peter 2:9-10 Why were we called to God’s Church?

Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Exodus.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of James

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott’s 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

The current series: *Jesus Behaving Badly*