

**Grace Episcopal Church Galena, Illinois  
July 3, 2016**

**Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Gloria Hopewell  
Texts- 2 Kings and Luke 10**

This is one heck of a time. Just days after the Galena City Council gave our building plans its “yes” vote. Just when the first phase—the difficult series of hearings and testimonies from supporters and dissenters is coming to a close. And when the next series of challenges begins—engineers and soil test, detailed plans, blueprints, and money. Money—spending it, raising it, acquiring building materials, furnishings, stuff.

It is just at this time of celebration, anticipation, and, yes, anxiety, that we are reminded once again that the very early beginnings of what was to become Christ’s church was concerned with matters entirely unrelated to buildings or organizational details or material goods. No, the nascent movement that became Christ’s church was concerned with the harvest. And it was urgent.

This was not the 1st, not the 2nd, but the 3rd time in the course of two chapters of Luke’s gospel that Jesus sent out advance parties into territories that he would visit. The first two times, it was disciples—some or all of the Twelve. They were to seek places where they and Jesus would be received so that the teaching could take place.

The first time, the Twelve took their instructions, went out, then returned ecstatic about their successes in healing and ridding people of demons. The second time, our reading from last week, they were rejected in Samaria, but Jesus said to move on in peace. Others who were interested in following Jesus fell to the wayside, not up to the task that meant they would have no reliable place to lay their heads, no time to go back to say goodbye or take care of their business or their family matters.

This time, in today’s reading, there are more followers. We turn the page to Chapter 10 and find that there are 70 who didn’t run off. And Jesus sends them out with the same instructions as the disciples before them: no packed bags of snacks, no sleeping bags, no bugspray or sun screen, no extra socks. Just one pair of sandals, one outfit.

They were to go to homes in villages and accept whatever hospitality was offered. They would be the vulnerable ones—possibly received, but also possibly turned away. They would be the GUESTS not the HOSTS--receiving hospitality not offering it. Can you imagine? Me, either. But it clearly worked. 70 workers fanning out to bring in the harvest. Then another larger wave and another.

Well that was then. And this is now. The church has changed and grown. The world has changed. A nascent Jesus movement in the first century was not so different from any new movement or even an entrepreneurial organization. It starts with a vision. Not much structure. Trial and error. But, if it is to be successful, it must grow, and with growth comes the need for structure, for roles, for places to gather. And that is what happened with the church: first there were house churches where like-minded people gathered to learn and to share fellowship. In some times and places they had to meet in secret. Much later, there were basilicas and then cathedrals, hierarchy, doctrines. And more growth—sometimes by coercion and conquest. There were wars and plagues, discovery of new lands, new knowledge in science and technology, revolutions and reformations, splitting apart and coming together. New concepts of government and freedom.

Such a different world from the one that Jesus and the disciples knew! And yet, we still follow him and his teachings—or try to. What is it that his 1st century ways can teach us? What can it teach a society where there is no longer a deeply embedded law of hospitality to the stranger. Where, indeed, knocking on the door of a house is met with suspicion, at the least? And, is there now such an urgency to bring in the abundant harvest—to tell the story?

Jesus' time was limited. He was just getting the mission started—initiating the Kingdom of God. His followers would need to carry on. In the time of Luke's people, there was still the belief that the Kingdom would be fulfilled in their life times, that Jesus would soon return. As the years went on, and Jesus did not return, perhaps the urgency diminished. Other than some modern day apocalyptic sects, do we spend any time thinking about urgency anymore?

And yet, here we are in a world that so desperately needs love and peace, belonging and significance. The stresses and struggles of life are different, but no less acute. We can't go back to the 1st century. We don't need to. We can still learn from Jesus because these basic human needs are still present—and the workers are still few. The growth curve of our institutions has hit the downward slope. That is our urgency.

Jesus sent out the people. To engage with other people. They did not wait for others to come to them. They went out, and not with some grand fanfare like Namaan's horses and chariots, bags of silver and gold in our lesson from 2 Kings this morning. They went two by two, humbly, prayerfully. They did not use coercion, force conversion. The people they went to could choose to accept or reject the blessing of peace they were given. If they accepted, the story was told, the community built, the sick and the troubled healed. If they said "no," they moved on, shaking the dust from their sandals, and given a rather stern warning, "You've missed the boat. The Kingdom has come near."

There is something I've been wondering lately. Do you suppose it was God's hope and dream that more people wouldn't reject the story? That the Kingdom would be fulfilled more rapidly? Right here on earth?

We have an opportunity. We will move forward to add to our building so that all can be included in a safe and accessible place where we can gather. At the same time, we must keep the main thing the main thing – not be consumed by the planning and acquiring of the “stuff” we need for our own comfort. Or being too busy with the project to be present to those beyond our doors.

Jesus' mission is still ours – in this world. The harvest is still abundant and the workers few. We can get wrapped up in our own needs and wants, distracted from what we are called to do and to be. Or, we can practice traveling light.

Amen.