

When in Rome
August 4, 2019
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

14 years ago this month, Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coast. The storm caused \$81B+ in damages, almost \$70B more than Hurricane Betsy in 1965. It left many without homes. I can remember driving down with the HS youth group at my home church to help in Katrina relief efforts the following June. We took three/four large SUVs filled with kids, luggage, and tools. I sat next to my childhood friend, Zak, the whole way, listening to how he really wanted to find a “z” from a destroyed Pizza Hut sign to hang in his room. Once we got about 20-30 miles out, that changed. We started seeing boats along the freeway. The traffic getting into New Orleans was constant stop and go. Once we got to the city limits, all we saw was indescribable destruction. Zak never mentioned wanting to look for a “Z” to hang in his room after that. We gutted a house for two days, then helped build houses with Habitat for Humanity for two days. After we were done, we went on our merry way, and I felt like I had made some difference, like my savior complex had been satisfied. Growing up, this is what I thought doing mission was. Going somewhere and fixing, building, and/or tearing down things. Growing up, “mission was basically swooping in and saving the day for those less fortunate than yourself. I saw it as a self-satisfactory work rather than doing God’s work. According to the reading today, this is not what mission is at all.

I want to talk about the different elements present in this story, each that gives a new perspective on what it is to do mission. Jesus begins by telling the disciples that he is sending them “Like lambs into the midst of wolves.” Jesus is warning them that they, the 70 disciples, may very well meet hostility/resistance in the place they are being sent to. People might reject them because of where they hail from. People might reject them because of the message they bring. People might reject them for some other reason. I spoke last week about crossing lines and hostility potentially to be met for doing so. I won’t touch on this too much besides to reiterate that mission is not something that is by any means easy. There is the chance you will face opposition. There is a chance you will be called somewhere you never thought you would go to do things you never thought you’d be doing. There is a chance you will see things you never thought you’d witness in your lifetime.

Second, Jesus tells them to “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals.” This list sounds very specific, but actually, it’s not. This list is both figurative and literal. It means not to bring the literal items listed, but these items also represent what belongs to a person physically, spiritually, and emotionally. A person who is wanting to do God’s mission is to leave everything behind. Physical possessions, troubles/demons, aspirations of being a hero/godsend, all that is to be left behind, because everything that a person needs will be provided out of hospitality. Eat what you are served. (Admittedly, I wasn’t very good at this one. I turned food away fairly often on my mission trips. I never ate the jambalaya or red beans and rice in NOLA. I never ate beans in Mexico.) Stay and sleep where you are told. Do so without opposition.

Next, Jesus tells them “Greet no one on the road.” I feel like this one is the most curious commandment of all given to them. Doing mission work isn’t really a “behind the scenes” work. Doing mission puts you out there in the public eye. So, telling them to ignore other people on

the road, to not talk to anyone, that sounds a little counterproductive, doesn't it? This command is designating a singular focus; focusing on that which God wishes for you to do. Making friends with those passed by on the road, those friends/acquaintances represent the distractions that one is leaving behind, distractions from what one is to be focused on. So, in short then, Jesus is sending out 70 disciples with no one to accompany them outside of a fellow disciple, no physical possessions or anything to sustain themselves, and to a place where it's entirely possible they will meet nothing but rejection.

Why do they do this? They do it because of their faith in God. They believe in their heart of hearts that God will be with them. They believe God will provide for them just as God provided for the Israelites in the 40 years of wandering through the desert. They believe that, even if their fellow humans reject them, God still accepts them. They do it because of their knowledge of God's presence. We see the phrase "God has drawn near" repeated throughout this story. "To draw near" isn't a reference to time, as in "God will soon arrive." "To draw near" is in reference to space, as in "God is here, among us." They go where God leads, knowing God is with them. They do it because the effectiveness of their mission work depends on it. Without all this "baggage," their only choice was to get fully immersed in the society. They have to eat what the locals eat, work alongside the locals in the local trades, celebrate the local customs and celebrations. I can honestly say that, after my year in New Orleans as a YAV, I felt much more like I had done effective mission than my mission trip to New Orleans in 2006. I was thrown into a culture I had no idea about. I celebrated my first Mardi Gras there. I ate what they ate, and found out I actually love jambalaya. I brought only some clothes, a few games, and some office supplies for my office at the hospital. I felt closer to God during that year than I did in the one week of helping with Katrina Relief.

In the end, the biggest thing to remember about doing mission is who it benefits. You may get warm and fuzzy feelings by doing it. You may feel empowered for doing it. That's not why we do mission. "Do we want those to whom we go in mission to see our power and privilege, or God's power and blessing? How are God's presence and character evident in the actions and practices that comprise our mission?" (*Connections*, Year C, vol. III, 139) As you can see, there's a lot that goes into effectively doing mission. There is much we as a church can do in mission. I invite you as you go from this place to think about what mission work God might be calling you personally to do or that God might be leading you towards leading our church to do.