

“Appointed and Sent”

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go” (Luke 10:1).

Today, just after the invocation that began the service, we witnessed the Baptism of Samantha Adams/Christian Conrad/Ashton Kraft. In this sacramental act we watched God at work and, in the final statement of the Baptismal liturgy, I said these words: “Through Baptism God has added Samantha Adams/Christian Conrad/Ashton Kraft to His own people, to declare the wonderful deeds of our Savior, who has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9). This proclamation uses words from First Peter to make a bold statement that in the miracle of Baptism God calls us! He calls us out of darkness and into light, out of death and into life, out of sin and into Christ and, we also learn from this Bible verse, that He does it for a reason! Peter tells us in no uncertain terms that we have been called to proclaim! To speak about what Christ has done! To announce that, the kingdom of God has come near! And this is the same the call we hear into today’s Gospel lesson from Luke 10.

Today, as we consider this reading in which Jesus sends out 72 disciples to go ahead of Him, we need to recognize that this sending is not unique. In fact, throughout the Bible God reveals Himself as a God who “sends.” Abraham is sent to go to a land of promise, Moses is sent to free God’s people from slavery, the Apostles are sent to baptize and teach, Saul is sent to share with the gentiles...and we have, as Peter says, been sent to “declare the wonderful deeds of our Savior.” This is part of who we are in Christ; it is our identity as Baptized disciples of Jesus. Like the 72, we have been called and, like the 72, we have been sent. This *is* the Christian life, “sending” is not optional...so, why is it so difficult for us to go?

I must have been around ten or eleven years-old when I first faced with the challenge of being sent. Our little Lutheran church in Springfield, Illinois, was in the middle of an evangelism campaign designed to go out into the blue-collar neighborhood around our church and share the Gospel. We were using a popular outreach program of the day that involved knocking on the door of a complete stranger and then greeting them with the following question: “If you died tonight...would you go to heaven?” Just like in today’s Gospel reading, we were given our instructions and then sent out two by two and, I must say, in my fourth grade mind I definitely felt like a lamb in the midst of wolves. I’m sure it all sounded good on paper and “If you died tonight...” is certainly a dramatic opening line, but all I remember from the experience was a litany of doors slamming, a few that were opened by partially dressed, scowling old men and some forcefully spoken swear words that I had never actually heard adults use before. I can’t remember too many other things about the experience but whenever I hear the word “canvas” used as a verb, I still get nervous.

If nothing else, my childhood experience as a reluctant evangelist, certainly gave me a new appreciation for today’s reading from Luke. Listen again to some of the instructions Jesus gives to the 72: “Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road” (Luke 10:3-4). And later in the text, “whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town” (Luke 10:10-12). I could have used that last line back in Springfield.

When I listen to these words from Jesus, I’m struck by the urgent and confrontational nature of His call and, even as Jesus tells His disciples about the miraculous signs they will perform, you can’t help but notice the reality of rejection they will face. It’s true that some people would receive their message, but others would reject and curse their presence and their proclamation. For the 72 disciples, the context of the call was clear: Jesus was sending them ahead to prepare people for His visit; to announce that, in Jesus, the kingdom of God had come. But today, for us disciples, this is a challenging reading and the context for Christ’s call on our lives looks vastly different from the situation described in Luke 10. So, how then, are we supposed to apply and respond to our “sending God” today?

Well, the first and most important thing that we need to know is that we have been appointed by God. This word is used in the first verse of today’s text and we need to understand what this means. As we hear this term it probably conjures up a number of different definitions that change with the context, but the Greek verb that Luke chose for verse one is a word that carries the weight of an official declaration that the “one appointed” has received some kind of office or power. It is a word of legal proclamation and the only time it’s used in the Bible is in this very passage. The “appointment” described

in this verse is precisely the kind of divine action that we witnessed today in the Baptism as God, speaking through His Word, proclaimed, declared and appointed Samantha/Christian/Ashton righteous in Christ. And through our Baptism into Christ and through the Word of Christ in the Gospel and in His Body and Blood given and shed for us, God has declared us righteous! He has proclaimed us to be new creations! He has forgiven our sins! He has appointed us for eternal life! And we are here today, because God has acted first. Our life in Christ has never been our idea. As William Willimon once wrote, "Being Christian is, in a way, weirdly un-American. We are a people who have been deeply indoctrinated into the godless ideology that our lives are our possessions to do with as we please, that my life is the sum of my astute choices, and that the life I'm living is my own. But this is not the case." We have been summoned to this faith...and being disciples of Jesus Christ was God's work – not ours! In one way or another, you are here today because God has found you. He has called you to this life and in His Word He has appointed you...and today, in His Word, you are being sent.

In verse two of our reading Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful" and that statement is as true today as it was when Jesus first said it. Last October, the Pew Research Center released a study called, "*Nones*" on the Rise. The "nones" that this study deals with aren't ones in the black and white hats, these "nones" are spelled "n-o-n-e-s" and it's a term that refers to people in America who claim no official connection to a church. According to the Pew study, "one-fifth of American adults have no religious affiliation," and in young people, this percentage is as high as one-in-three (35%).¹

Jesus told the 72, "The harvest is plentiful." This is still true today and it is into this harvest field that we have been sent as Baptized believers, appointed by God. Your life was redeemed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God the Father has called you through your Baptism into Christ and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you have been sent ahead to proclaim that the "kingdom of God is near." Those statements are true. They describe who you are in Jesus Christ and they are non-negotiable. *So what does all of this mean?* It means that wherever you are you have been sent by God. And it also means that wherever you go, Christ will follow!

Remember, the 72 were sent ahead of Jesus. They were not alone! And just as He accompanied the 72, the risen and living Christ also accompanies you. For some of you, the work to which God has called you will be dramatic. For others, His call may look mundane and yet you can be certain that Christ has called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light so that you can declare His wonderful and saving deeds...and in your voice, His voice will be heard and in your work, His work will be done.

In the next week, God will send a team from Emmanuel to join missionaries Tony and Connie Booker in Prague and their job will be to declare the wonderful deeds of our Savior to children they've never met and won't see again until heaven. And in the next week, God will send one of you to listen to a family member who struggles to receive Christ with peace...and in the next week, one of you will be sent by God to reach out with a card or phone call to a neighbor struggling with the loss of loved one...and, in the next week, one of you will speak God's comfort to a friend who is preparing to send a child to college...and in the next week, one of you will be sent to share a word of peace to a co-worker who is bound up with anger...and, in the next week, God will send one of you to bring the promise of heaven to a dying friend.

As people appointed by God, in the next week we will all be sent to proclaim the wonderful deeds of our Savior. And you know what...some people will reject you and the God who sent you. But some will receive you and when they receive you, they will receive the God who sent you. And that will make an eternal difference!

This is the way the risen Christ works...He sends! The Latin word for "send" is "missio." It's where we get our word mission. To be "on a mission" doesn't only mean to get on a plane and go to Prague. "Mission" means that you are doing what you are doing, and you are where you are, because God has put you there. To be "on a mission" means nothing more than being sent by God.

You want to hear something amazing? Whatever saving work God wants to do in the world, He has chosen to do it through you! He has appointed you and He has sent you and God never sends you alone! Christ is before you...Christ is behind you...Christ is within you...and Jesus Christ will work through you to bring His kingdom near. Go with His peace, declare His wonderful deeds, and rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Amen.

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold

¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx#UHQPUf3TvfI.facebook>