

Harvest

Part 3

Luke 10:1-11 (NIV)

¹ 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. ² He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. ³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. ⁵ "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' ⁶ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. ⁸ "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' ¹⁰ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.'

This was my favourite TV show when I was a kid, a black and white Japanese series made in the early sixties called the "Phantom Agents". I think it was my first exposure to eastern martial arts and six-year-old me thought it was very cool. The Phantom agents were the goodies, government agents using their ninja skills to fight evil. They could jump backwards up into trees, I loved that. They flicked their hands and star shaped knives would fly everywhere. They used crazy ninja moves to disarm and confound their enemies who were always dressed in black, while the phantom agents wore fashionable tan pants and expressed safety consciousness by wearing bike helmets. I particularly liked the way they always ran everywhere in single file, (I don't think they owned a car), using these super quick little steps holding onto the grip of their swords.



Strangely, this is what came to mind when I was reading Luke's passage on the sending out of the seventy-two. As I read the passage I thought, wow, Jesus is sending out his ninjas. He is sending them out on a secret mission to travel fast and travel light. Walk barefoot, take nothing that will slow you down and do not stop for anything on the way. I kind of like that idea, Jesus and his ninjas. Unfortunately Jesus next set of instructions are both confusing and completely mess up the ninja mystique,



Jesus tells them that when they get to their destination they should find a nice B&B and stay awhile. Eat everything they put in front of you. What is going on here? Jesus appeared to be emphatic that the mission was super urgent, but the assignment he

gives them is to stop, rest and enjoy some hospitality. To get our heads around what is going on here I think it's helpful to express Jesus intention in the form of a statement:

The most urgent and important thing that you can do with your life is stop and build deep relationships.

Two weeks ago we began our series on the harvest; a vision of Jesus looking out upon all the people of the world as an endless golden field of wheat. Row upon row of human beings bursting with goodness and potential that will wither on the stalk unless there is a harvest. The purpose for which Jesus created the church was to be actively involved in this harvest, which is both drawing people into relationship with God and making an impact on the wellbeing of the world in justice.

For the next two Sundays we are going to be looking closely at this passage and the central harvest strategy that Jesus taught the early church, that;

Harvest Strategy: *The most important and urgent thing that you can do with your life is to stop and build deep relationships.*

Around this strategy Jesus also teaches seven important mission principles of which we will cover five this morning. So let's pick up the first principle at the beginning of Luke 10.

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)

The passage begins "*After this*" – the "*this*"; being referred to, is Jesus sending out the 12 apostles on a mission trip and revealing to his followers that his mission objective was to go to Jerusalem, get killed and rise from the dead (Luke 9:22). In effect the sending of the 72 in Luke 10 is saying; folk's, things are coming to a head, time is short, soon you are going to be out in the world being my representatives and there are few things you need to get straight. The first being *the harvest is a mission for all believers* and not just for leaders like the apostles - it's for everyone.

Mission principles:

1. The harvest is a mission for all believers

In this, Jesus is anticipating a rather unfortunate dynamic in the churches future in which God's mission will sometimes be left to leadership like the clergy, and sometimes the mission will become the sole possession of Leaders, like the clergy. In this passage Jesus is reminding us that the church in its entirety has a mission and none of us are following Jesus properly if we are simply hearing about the mission and not doing the mission (James 1:22). The one proviso Jesus makes is that not everyone is necessarily ready to be Christ's representative. You may have noticed that Jesus did not call for volunteers he **appointed** seventy-two, that is he chose those people who were of sufficient maturity and understanding to progress the kingdom and not set it back.

Jesus emphasises this principle of the mission of the whole church by the number of people he chose. You see the number 70 or 72, **(that some translations have 70 and some have 72 is actually a complicated biblical textual issue that I would be happy to**

go through if you want to follow this up), depending on whether you were reading in Hebrew or Greek, was highly significant because for Hebrews numbers are not just for counting, they signified things. In this case the numbers 70 or 72 were well known as the number of all nations recorded in the early days of the world in Genesis 10. It is also the number of elders appointed to assist Moses in getting the Hebrews to the Promised Land in Numbers 11:16, and Jesus most likely chose this number to indicate that the mission of the church was both to all nations and would require everyone doing their bit.

For those who really love numbers we will have a brief diversion:

Total number of people sent out on mission trips by Jesus

12 apostles + 72 other disciples = 84

84 is a multiple of 7 and 12

7 = being the number for God's mission plan

12 = being the number for God's people

72 = being the number for the mission of the church

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)

So the first principle is that *the harvest is a mission for all believers*. The second principle is that *the harvest is completed in Jesus*.

Harvest Strategy: *The most urgent and important thing that you can do with your life is stop and build deep relationships.*

1. *The harvest is a mission for all believers*
2. *The harvest is completed in Jesus*

Jesus sends out his ninjas with the understanding that He is coming to join them. And it is exactly the same for us, when we participate in the mission, it is both **about** Jesus but it is also **in** Jesus. Jesus is coming, he is coming in his love and in his power to the people that you and I know and love and pray for. Jesus sends us out but he is coming. This is what he tells the disciples after issuing them the great commission; that he will be with them always (Matthew 28:20). This is what we find in our age care ministry all the time. We arrive at an aged care facility with very little capacity to battle the confusions of dementia and the darkness of depression, but Jesus is coming. We are just the advanced party, we get things ready, but Jesus is the one who is coming to deliver on the deal. We talk about Jesus, but when people meet Jesus, heart to heart, look out gates of hell, because there is going to be harvest, completed in him.

This is what Jesus was saying in the miracle of the fish when he called his first followers. In Luke chapter five, Jesus suggests to the fisherman Simon Peter who had caught nothing all night, to have another go at fishing. With much grumbling they go out onto the lake and almost immediately their nets are full of fish. The point Jesus is making is very clear, you do your bit, you fashion your nets, you build your relationships, and you go fishing and I will do the rest. I will send the fish, by my power I will send the fish and I will make you fishers of men (Matthew 4:19).

*He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."
(Luke 10:2)*

In preaching on this passage we sometimes focus on the “workers are few” bit, which unfortunately misses the essential affirmation that the *harvest is plentiful*. This is a really important affirmation and our third mission principle; *the harvest is plentiful*:

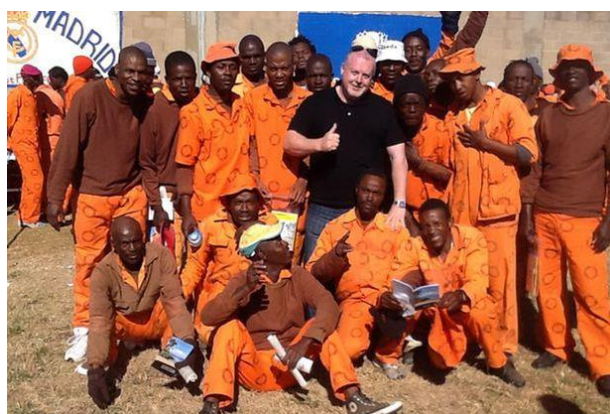
Mission principles

1. *The harvest is a mission for all believers*
2. *The harvest is completed in Jesus*
3. *The harvest is plentiful*

This is a really an essential attitude. One of the churches I grew up in possessed a deep underlying assumption that there was no harvest. Because of this there was no outreach, there was no evangelism, there was no mission and nobody came to know God through this church. This church was a fellowship of people that met together to celebrate what God had done in the past without any kind of sense that God wanted to transform lives right now and in the future. That church closed its doors a couple of years ago.

Jesus affirmation is that the harvest is plentiful, that there are plenty of people searching for God, and that you will find plenty of people searching for God. What I have discovered is that often people don't know its God they are searching for because the picture of God in their head, if they have one at all, is so distorted it is a picture that nobody would want. The truth is that the world is full of people who do not realise that all their essential hopes to be loved, find meaning and purpose, can be found in God.

This is what happened to a man who ran London's biggest brothel and was planning a murder when he was sent to prison and discovered that he was secretly, unknown even to himself, looking for God. John Lawson (the guy in the black tee-shirt) described his former self to the BBC as a “horrible animal”. After a difficult childhood, Lawson became a bouncer and moved to London where he ran the biggest brothel in the capital. He felt like he had ‘made it in life’ – owning a big house and a luxury car: “all the things we think in life make us happy”. Lawson then got involved in international ‘debt collection’ – kidnapping people who owed money. He now describes his old self as someone who was “cold-hearted” enough to plan a murder.



Instead, police caught Lawson and he was sent to prison. It was there that he was befriended by a Nigerian man who was constantly “harping on about God”. Lawson said he went along to listen to a prison Bible study led by a preacher, when he heard there was coffee, cake and biscuits on offer. He explained that he planned to take the food when the others were “in their holy huddles, with their eyes closed”. But

when he saw the other prisoners were so happy, and singing praise to God, he started crying.

The next morning his Nigerian friend gave him a Bible, where he read in Ezekiel, “if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die”. Lawson knew he was a “wicked man”. He went back to the preacher, who told him the good news of Jesus Christ. Following his release from jail, he became involved with an outreach and training ministry, which sees him going into prisons around the world.

The world is full of John Lawson’s desperately yearning for a loving God they don’t realise they are looking for until people like Lawson’s Nigerian friend help them to connect the dots.

He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

We need to quickly cover our last two mission principles. Principle 4, *the harvest presents opportunities and dangers*

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. (Luke 10:3)

Mission Principles

1. *The harvest is a mission for all believers*
2. *The harvest is completed in Jesus*
3. *The harvest is plentiful*
4. *The harvest presents opportunities and dangers*

This command of Jesus is not quite what it sounds like. It kind of sounds like Jesus is telling his followers to go out and die at the hands of ruthless people and let's be truthful that has been part of the deal for some Jesus followers over the years, and increasingly so. Open doors estimates that over 7,000 Christians were killed for their faith in the 2014-2015 period, which represents a significant increase.

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/open-doors-world-watch-list-2015-deadliest-year-christians-killed-for-faith-jesus-christ-154875/>). Yes danger is an aspect of following Jesus, but we need to understand what a lamb represents for a Jewish person. The lamb is the temple sacrifice which takes away the sin of the people. One of the names of Jesus is; “*the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). If Jesus is sending us out as lambs, it’s not the defencelessness of lambs he is emphasising, but the power of God's Lambs to be agents of salvation, lambs showing carnivores how to be vegetarians.

Finally the last principal is urgency:

Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. (Luke 10:4)

Mission Principles

1. *The harvest is a mission for all believers*
2. *The harvest is completed in Jesus*
3. *The harvest is plentiful*
4. *The harvest presents opportunities and danger*
5. *The harvest is urgent*

In essence Jesus is telling his followers that to be a people with a mission we need to avoid being weighed down by material possessions or shallow relationships. I find this fairly confronting. The bible is really clear that nothing matters more to God than seeking and saving lost people. But when I ask myself the question what matters most to me? What do I think about? What do I spend my money on? What do I give my time to? I find that my priorities are not always Gods priorities and that troubles me because God has invested everything in us, we are his plan. If we do not seek and save lost people there is no plan B. If we do not live our lives with a sense of urgency for the mission of God then other things will inevitably take priority in our life and something that needs doing for the sake of someone's life, may not get done, because we weren't available.

Donald Ewing of Wheeling, West Virginia says the following about seizing opportunities:

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool. To weep is to risk appearing sentimental. To reach out to another is to risk involvement. To expose feelings is to risk exposing our true self. To place your ideas and your dreams before the crowd is to risk loss. To love is to risk not being loved in return. To live is to risk dying. To hope is to risk despair. To try at all is to risk failure. But to risk we must, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing. The man, the woman, who risks nothing does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.

Next week we are going to look carefully at what Jesus has to say about this harvest strategy: *The most urgent and important thing that you can do with your life is build deep relationships.* As we consider the great purpose Jesus has called us to we will also celebrate belonging to this great missionary movement – the church.