

It All Depends on Jesus

Theme: Jesus sends workers to bring in the harvest. Proper 9 (14) Yr. C

Object: A suitcase and a list of all the things you must pack when taking a vacation.

Scripture: 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. 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. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. Luke 10:1-4 (NIV)

I am getting ready to go on vacation. I have my bags all packed and ready to go. I am really looking forward to this chance to "get away from it all" so I can relax. I have a list of all the things I need to take with me on vacation.

- Clothes - enough for two weeks
- Hair dryer - in case they don't have one at the hotel
- Shaving kit (or cosmetic case) - to stay looking my best
- Some comfortable shoes - for when I have to walk
- Sandals - in case I go to the beach
- Swim suit - for the beach or the hotel swimming pool
- Camera - for sightseeing trips
- Laptop computer - so I can check my email and surf the web
- A book - in case I get bored
- Traveler's checks, plenty of cash, and credit cards

Can you think of any other things I may have forgotten? I want to make sure that I have everything I might need on the trip. Sometimes I think that when I go on vacation, I am not really "getting away from it all" -- I am taking it all with me!

The Bible tells us that Jesus appointed seventy-two of his followers and sent them out, two-by-two, to go into every town and place where he was about to go. Do you know what Jesus told them to take with them? Nothing!

Jesus said to them, "Go!" Then he went on to say, "Do not even take a purse, or a bag, or a pair of sandals."

Now, why did Jesus say that? I think it is because when Jesus sends someone on a mission, their success or failure does not depend upon what they bring with them -- it depends on him! One reason I can be pretty certain of that is because of something else Jesus told the people when he sent them out. He said, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

Just as Jesus sent out the seventy-two people, he wants you and me to go to people today and share the good news that the kingdom of God is near. The results do not depend upon us. We should not become puffed up when people receive the message and we should not be discouraged when they reject the message. We should just go

and tell as if everything depends on Jesus -- because it does!

Dear Jesus, may we be ready and willing to go when you say, "Go!" and leave the results up to you. Amen.

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned

and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant."

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'

"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Let us pray...Amen.

Today's scriptures have an interesting relationship to power. In this modern world, and in the biblical world that we hear about in our lessons this morning, power is a necessary thing. Does anybody here today feel particularly powerful this morning?

Let's take a quick look at where the power lies in our Hebrew scripture. Who is powerful in this story of healing? First off, Naaman, the great military commander. He has a lot of power. He vanquished the people of Israel, he commanded a great army for the King, he may be close to the top of the list of the most powerful people in this story.

Next, the king. The king who is over the commander of his army would seem to have a lot of power, and kings usually assert their power regularly and publicly. So the king in this story has quite a lot of power.

I suppose the queen, the king's wife has some power. Obviously enough to rule over servants, at least, but the way relationships go, if you are married to a king, you usually qualify as someone who has power!

Then, the prophet Elisha. Elisha has a different kind of power, doesn't he? His power isn't military power like Naaman, it's not political power, like the king, and it's not social power like the queen. Elisha has a spiritual power; power strong enough that he can be an equal with Naaman and the king.

But for all his military prowess, Naaman has leprosy, an incurable skin disease that makes him both sick, and ritually unclean among the very people he controls.

For all his political power, the king can't help but be nervous about this request from Naaman, thinking it is a provocation for war.

And for all his spiritual power, Elisha can't make the king or Naaman do anything they don't want to do.

So how does anything get resolved in this story? The slaves, the unnamed and unknown servants of the powerful, have faith in God. And they have the power to persuade Naaman to swallow his pride and do as Elisha has told him.

The first time it's the servant of Naaman's wife, and the second time it's Naaman's own servants, people of Israel, captured in battle, enslaved by physical power, who convince their master to go and do as the prophet has instructed.

Physical power, political power, social power, spiritual power, none of it is enough to convince Naaman to follow Elisha's instructions. It takes the humble faith of the people of Israel to convince Naaman to seek his own healing.

Traditional power here fails, but the power of faith does not. Once Naaman gets over himself, he washes in the river, and is healed. The truly powerful people here were the servants and slaves.

In a similar way, our gospel lesson tells of the time Jesus sent out 70 elders to share God's peace, to heal illnesses, and bring the good news to those who would hear it. He sent them without the usual signs of power and stature: no purse, meaning no money, no bags, meaning no clean clothes, no sandals, meaning the elders would look more like destitute beggars than disciples of Christ.

He instructed them on how to act when the homes they visited welcomed their peace, and how to act when the homes rejected their peace. But equipped only with the power of their faith, these elders went around the country-side casting out demons, healing illnesses, and spreading the Lord's peace.

When they returned to him, astonished at the power they had to make demons submit to them, Jesus gave them the most important instruction of all: do not rejoice that you have the power to command demons, rejoice that your names are written in heaven. In other words, don't hold your power over others, privately celebrate that there is a place for you in heaven.

Now that is a *different* kind of power!

In a world where we are judged by our power, by our ability to make people do things according to our will, our holy scripture is reminding us that the true power is the power of our faith in God. The true power isn't in making people do things, it's in our relationship with God.

None of us here is particularly powerful according to modern standards. No presidents, members of Congress, no judges, kings, or royalty of any

kind are here today. No, the power we find in gathering on a Sunday morning in July is the power to share God's healing love with others. The power to receive the body and blood of Christ as signs of our loving covenant with Jesus, the power to love and be loved. That power is stronger than any military power, any political power, and social power the world might throw at us. We have the power to share God's love with others, and know that our relationship with God is secure.

This week I encourage each of you to reflect on the areas in your life where you feel powerless, helpless, unable to affect change. And then I want you to reflect on the power you possess to be in relationship with God, and with all of God's children. When we do that, in humble gratitude, we have more power than the world can imagine. Amen.