

Proper 9 Year C - Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Good morning. It is good for us to be together this morning. Hopefully by now I have had a chance to introduce myself to you, if you are a regular attender here at St. Matthew's Church. If you are a visitor, well, this is my first Sunday, too. So we will learn together. My name is Charlie McClain and I am delighted to be your new vicar.

I wanna begin this morning with a couple of stories about ministry. These things happened last summer when I was engaged in a chaplaincy program at a couple of nursing home facilities over in Marion County. When I first signed up for the program, the head chaplain and the director of one of facilities sat down to interview me. Toward the end of our time together, they began to ask me about skills or hobbies that I could bring into the facility to help the residents there. I mentioned that I played the guitar a little, and listen y'all... this next thing, the following words came out of my mouth and future me is standing here today still trying to shove the dumbest thing I think I ever said back into my mouth... I said, "Yeah, I play the guitar a little bit, but I am here to do *real* ministry, so I'd rather not have that get in the way." I promise I said that.

Well, the chaplain encouraged me to bring my guitar one day, and I promise you, I would never for the rest of that Summer leave home without it. I would encounter someone who basically was so far gone down the road of dementia or the natural effects of aging that they could barely string two or three words together if they could speak at all. Now I am someone who loves words, it is one thing that drew me to the Episcopal Church, the beauty of the words of the book of common prayer. I depend on my words to communicate and engage with the world around me. I am good at words. But being good at words and depending on my facility with them was not enough to get through to the beloved children of God given to me to love and minister to in these out-of-the-way nursing homes out in Marion County. So we sang together and the words of old Gospel hymns (these are not in the Hymnal 1982 by the way)

Blessed Assurance Jesus is mine,

I come to the garden alone While the dew is still on the roses

These old songs lived in a part of them that the Spirit guarded, the way a person very near death will be able to recite the Lord's prayer or the 23rd psalm. Music brought a part of them alive.

And I thought that wasn't *real* ministry. When the strength I was used to depending on in my words was no longer available to me, I reached beyond what I thought *I* could do and handle, I encountered the resources of the risen Lord which are inexhaustible. It didn't turn me into a Chet Atkins or Jimi Hendrix or Yo Yo Ma musician or give me a singing voice like Elvis or Post Malone. But I wasn't afraid, and I connected to those people in a special way and assured them even if for the briefest moments, during the 43rd time through singing Amazing Grace that they were valuable, not forgotten, and beloved of God.

So our Gospel lesson is about this very thing today. Jesus is sending out his people on a little on the job training mission. They are learning about how to do ministry. And they are super excited, y'all. I mean wouldn't you be? Let's just list the things that happened in the previous chapter of the Gospel, chapter 9. Jesus feeds 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish, Jesus is transfigured before the eyes of Peter, James, and John and Moses and Elijah appear to them, and Jesus casts out a demon from a little boy. And now this same Jesus, and in your mind's eye, imagine that you are standing there in this group of seventy people, this Jesus who just did all this stuff, is sending you out to get people ready to meet him. Wouldn't you be excited? You are about to jump out of your own skin in anticipation of the adventure you are going to have.

Then, Jesus begins to give you the instructions.

You ever get to the swimming pool and get your swimsuit on and you're standing there in the full sun about to roast and all you can think of is that cool water splashing when you jump in, and then your mom or somebody makes you put on sunscreen and wait until it dries before you get in the water. Or you're getting ready to play a game and you are super excited to throw a kickball right at your best friend's face but the gym teacher has to tell you the rules...

That might be kinda how you feel standing in the crowd...

The harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few...

Naw I think we good here Jesus, we got enough to field at least two or three teams we got this!

I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves...

Now, hmm... I'm not sure I like the sound of this. Sounds I dunno, dangerous... can I play on the wolf team? You sure you didn't mean it the other way around?

Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road...

I know Jesus is not trying to mess with my money. I wanted to cast out demons and stuff... I wanted to do real ministry.

Jesus is a master administrator, but he doesn't have the same goals as the principal or board of directors or HR department at your place of business or school. Jesus is not hiring the best people for the job. He is making the people doing the work they have been given to do into the best people they can be. All while spreading the good news of the Gospel. People shouting the Mystery of Faith with a stain on their shirt, shoes untied, and toilet paper trailing off behind them. We are flying the plane while it is being built. We are proclaiming the Gospel as it is coming into the world more fully each day.

We are broken people entrusted with the story of salvation which just so happens to be our very own story, even if the chapter we are writing today isn't going very well, thank you very much and I wish you would mind our own business especially when my kids are screaming bloody murder in the middle of Wal-mart thank you very much.

The reason Jesus is sending us out into a dangerous world, asking that we not rely on our own resources, is because Jesus has seen your bank account, he knows you can't afford to do what he is asking of you. Your patience is too thin. Your emotional endurance is not up to par. You're working on it. But Jesus knows that the life of faith and the work of ministry is not a sprint, it is a marathon. We cannot rely on what we bring to the table alone to make it through this life. We have been given gifts, and we have commandments about sabbath keeping and rest, we live in a culture that is finally getting around to talking seriously about self-care and mental health. Please avail yourself of the help that is available to you. But also take time to develop in prayer and study and getting out into the world that God loves so much that he became one of us... take time to develop that relationship.

At the end of the day, ministry is not about how good you can swing a hammer at a habitat for humanity build, how much trash you can clean up off of the Collins River, or how pretty you sing at the nursing home, ministry is about the long-haul commitment in steadfast love to the people of God. That is risky business folks. It is risky to call an untested newly graduated and ordained deacon to lead your church. But you did it. It is risky for me to move to a place I have never been to do a job I have never done before. But I did it. I pray that as we move further into our relationship together, getting to know one another, having the inevitable conflicts that will arise, sharing some laughs and some tears, and I hope some music and some fellowship around some good eating, we realize that we are operating on a different set of priorities than the world does. We value the discomfort of stepping out into uncertainty because we are tapped into the inexhaustible resources of the risen Lord who we see in the face of the stranger and drink deeply from at the altar of his sacrifice together. Know this, the kingdom of God has come near.

I have said these things to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Preached at St. Matthew's Church, McMinnville, TN 7-3-22 – First Sunday at the Church