

First Presbyterian Church
Summer of Love Sermon Series: Missions of Love
Rev. 3:20 & Luke 10: 1-11
Rev. Catherine Oliver
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Before we read our Gospel lesson for today from Luke 10, it would be helpful to know that there is great tension and drama occurring in Jesus' life!

In the previous chapter, Luke 9, Jesus had, "set his face toward Jerusalem." Which is a biblical code meaning that Jesus knew that he was heading towards his last days on earth.

In chapter 9, Jesus had sent 12 disciples out to heal the sick and preach the that the KOG was near.

But now in chapter 10, our text for today, Jesus sends not 12 but 70 disciples out on a mission of love.

Jesus directs the 70 to go to every town and place where he would soon follow. He gives them very specific directions showing the urgency of his situation:

Do not stop and talk to others on the way, stay with one family accepting their hospitality, take nothing for yourself trusting that God will provide, proclaim the KOG is near, and offer peace to all who will receive you.

Indeed, this was a mission of Love.

Let us prepare our hearts and minds as we listen to our Gospel lesson for today: Luke 10:1-11.

10 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.'

The word of the Lord...

Our sermon title for today is "Missions of Love." I believe that mission work can take many forms.

Perhaps you went some place outside of the country, or went to another state in the U.S. to help others.

Perhaps you have supported some of our local missions like First Light or helped with Vacation Bible School, taught Sunday School or even driven a group of vibrant and excited teens to Montreat? A true mission of love!

You may have written cards of hope and encouragement to people in need or written to our U.S. representatives to challenge unjust laws.

You may have given your time, teaching, counseling or even used your gifts of singing in the choir providing, joy to others and honor to God.

You may have picked up left over bulletins and papers left in the pews after worship, or helped with our church's constant building needs. Perhaps you provide prayer support for others.

As I look out today, I see a congregation filled with mission workers. We all have different gifts and abilities and I see a congregation that fulfills Christ's call to proclaim that the KOG is here by doing missions of love.

All that true mission work requires is for us to be willing to reach out, and learn how to build bridges as we humbly learn from one another.

When I lived in California I had the opportunity to drive one of 3 van loads of very excited teens from my church to Tijuana, Mexico several summers in a row. Driving in Tijuana, was a mission all in itself. Everyone seemed to create their own lanes in traffic and I don't believe there were any posted speed limits. This created even more excitement for the youth as I white knuckled the steering wheel dodging back and forth through non-existent lanes of traffic.

After months of preparations we spent a week building homes for families. We did not have power tools so everything we did was by hand.

We mixed cement by hand and carried it in buckets to lay the foundation of the house we were building. We sawed the wood, hammered the nails into the frame and by the grace of God built a home in one week!

Granted the house was very simple. It had one door, 2 windows and even though the outside of the house was stuccoed, the inside was only a cement floor, framed wooden walls and tar paper.

There was no indoor plumbing nor electricity, but it was a new home for a family that had been living under tin roofs and sleeping on dirt floors.

When the house was complete our group gathered with the family, held hands and prayed. We shared a blessing of peace upon the new home and our family. And the family prayed a blessing upon us. Then hugs and tears of joy were shared as we said our good-byes..

The atmosphere in the van ride back to the United States always had a different feel than the van ride down to Mexico. The youth usually began the trip joking and teasing each other, often arguing over who got to choose the music or sit next to someone special.

But the van ride back was always different.

The youth no longer argued over music or seats. They didn't spend time comparing themselves with each other. Something had changed within them over the course of a week.

Where the initial intention of the mission trip was to help other people who lived in abject poverty, the results were somehow reversed.

We always arrive back at our little church on Saturday evening and then on Sunday morning the youth, exhausted as they were, lead worship for our congregation.

They told their stories about sensing God's presence not through the experience of building a house, but through the experience of building relationships with a family. They told stories not about what they had done for others, but about what the family had done for them!

In our text today we hear the urgent need to proclaim:

The Kingdom of God has come! The Kingdom of Justice is near! The shame of poverty, the neglect of God's people is coming to an end!

The Good News of the gospel proclaims God's radical justice and love for all people.

Scholars, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan teach what the true Kingdom of God looks like. They say:

"It's not that everyone has the same amount of money or power or property. But in God's Kingdom no one goes hungry, no one lives in poverty, no one lives without adequate health care. Because in the Kingdom of God everyone has enough."

According to Crossan, God's kingdom is a system of distributed justice where we all share, out of love for God.

In her book, *A Simple Path*, Mother Teresa says the greatest disease in the West is not TB or leprosy: it is feeling unwanted, unloved and uncared for. She said that we can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love.

The house we built in Mexico was very simple. There was no indoor plumbing or electricity. But it was a home for a family and the family felt the love that we shared with them in building it.

In our text today Jesus sends 70 people out to various towns and cities that he will visit. His directions seem so simple:

Cary no purse, no bag, no sandals.

Remain in the same house, eating whatever they provide.

When you enter the home say: "Peace to this house."

I wonder what our homes would feel like if every time we entered we offered a blessing of peace?

What would our communities feel like if we took the time to simply bring ourselves into other people's lives with the sole purpose of building relationships, by listening to and sharing life stories.

The Girouard family built a picnic table that our children painted during VBS. That picnic table now lives out in front of our church. This simple table is an invitation for others to stop by the church, rest and even share a snack together.

Jesus says, I am sending you out, because the KOG has come near
As followers of Jesus we are called to serve Christ through missions of love which can be as simple as listening to someone's story and sharing a cool drink.

Next Sunday after worship we will have an all ministry team gathering. We will share a simple meal, then go to assigned rooms to do our ministry team planning and discussion.

If you are not a part of a ministry team I invite you to come and learn more, sit in with a team. As our scripture says the harvest is ready and we always need more laborers.

If you want to just come for lunch and fellowship that is o.k. too.

Then on Saturday, August 4th from 8 to noon we have an opportunity for a local mission of love. We are invited to meet at Phillip's Academy to help clean up around the school, trim hedges, plant some flowers. Then at noon we will have a picnic with the teachers, and families who will be working with us so we can learn more about one another.

Together we will be serving Christ in this mission of love.

I leave you with these words from St. Teresa of Avila, reminding us that now we are the ones who carry on the missions of love that Jesus began:

Christ has no body on earth but yours;
no hands but yours; no feet but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out to the world.
Yours are the feet with which he goes about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which he blesses others.

Friends there is someone knocking on our door, longing for us to open up.
We are Christ's body in this world!

Let us be the Kingdom of God on earth, just as it is in heaven.
Amen