

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
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The Reverend Rick Veit

If you sin, if you are not welcoming enough, if you are not following God's Will, *as we understand God's Will*, then we reject you. Either you should be cast out of this community or we need to leave. You will not receive our attention, our love or care. You can fend for yourself for all we care.

I can't tell you how many times I have seen this behavior amongst Christians, amongst other religions, all in the name of God, as they understood God. Why? Because if you spend time with people who are sinning, their sin may rub off on you, right? Therefore, separate, get as far away as you possibly can. Start a new denomination or religion. It has been happening for thousands of years and it continues to happen today. Instead, stay. Do not leave. I may need you the most, especially if I am blind to sin.

This gospel reading from Luke has been used more than virtually any other scripture to justify separating and dividing from a body of people. It has been used to give up on others. "You, you evil people. We protest against you. We will leave you in the dust." Why? Because, at least on the surface, and if you take this literally, it seems that the Bible, the Word of God, instructs us to do so, especially here in Luke. Of course, Jesus is also the Word of God according to the Gospel of John, and Jesus teaches us to love unconditionally, love God and love our neighbor as we would ourselves – agape, without judgement. So, what gives? Let's dive in.

There is a sense of growth and movement in the gospel as Jesus appoints a number of people to go on ahead of him and prepare the way. This is the beginning of the early Christian church as Jesus sends out his disciples to preach about the kingdom of God. The Hebrew text of Genesis 10 describes seventy nations. Jesus sends seventy as a symbol that the entire world is to receive the message that the kingdom of God is near. According to the Mosaic Law, Deuteronomy 19:15, two witnesses were required for a testimony to be credible. For this reason and probably for the challenges of travel and for just support in general, Jesus sent them out in pairs, two by two. In the book of Acts, Luke describes Peter and John (8:14) traveling together, Paul and Barnabas (11:30; 13:1), Barnabas and Mark (15:39), Paul and Silas (15:40).

Next, we have the commissioning of these messengers. Just as disciples are sent out in pairs, so also this discourse is structured in pairs. And this is a message about the end times, the judgement day.

Jesus begins with two proverbs (2-3). "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. (The second proverb) See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." According to one commentator, the prophets of the OT used harvest as a metaphor for eschatological judgment and for the gathering of Israel in the end times. In every culture, harvest season is a time of great urgency. If you do not have enough laborers, you may lose the harvest. There are people out there who need to know that God is here and near, people who do not know God's peace and love. It is time to go to work! Be careful though. There will be opposition to your message.

The wolf is the natural predator of the lamb, and beware, the wolf may even be inside your community. When you go out, you do not need much, just the Word of the Lord. Don't greet people along the way. Or in other words, this is urgent. Do not waste time. It does not mean do not share the message of the gospel with people along the way. It does not mean separate or divide. It means that all of the people of the world need to know about God's love, the kingdom of God. Deliver the message. Build community. And keep doing this. You cannot control the response of the people, but keep reaching out, keep loving.

The next pair is Jesus' teaching about a positive response (5-9) and a negative response (10-11). If anyone shares in your peace, there will be peace. When you are there, be sure to receive their hospitality. Eat and drink with them. Notice how all the social barriers get broken down when hospitality is offered. Do not question whether anyone is worthy or not. Jew, gentile, whoever you are, offer hospitality, especially to the stranger, and receive hospitality, especially from a stranger. The laborer deserves to be paid. Do not ditch them. In fact, as you receive hospitality, offer them any gifts that you may have. God was healing people through the work of the disciples. Cure the sick. And be sure to offer them the message that the kingdom of God is coming near. The end times are upon us. Make the most of this time.

There are three pieces that the disciples learn in this positive message. Encourage community, table fellowship, or simply, eat and drink together. Care for each other, or cure the sick. And proclaim the Word of the Lord.

The second part of this pair is the negative response, verses 10-11. The disciples receive instruction on how to respond when rejected by someone. The message of the gospel and love is so important and urgent, if people do not want you around, continue to move on and share the message with others. Again, this is not meant to judge other people and separate if they are not following God's Will, as you know God's Will. Continue to love everyone and share the message. Build the community, then go on to build other communities. Once again, you cannot control their response. But do not divide and separate. Just continue teaching the message with *all* people.

The next pair is instructions for entering a house, verses 5-7, and entering a town, verses 8-9. All of this was just described in the negative and positive responses.

The final pair is the repetition of the message that the kingdom of God has come near. It is mentioned in verse 9, when the disciple is welcomed by people, and it is mentioned in verse 11, when the disciple is rejected by people. In other words, you will have people support you and not support you. But the message is the same. The kingdom of God, the need for love and caring, is urgent and needed now. Heaven is coming soon. Heaven is here now. Do not wait to act.

Lastly, we have the returning of the seventy disciples after they are sent out. There is great joy. In the end, evil, the demons, Satan, bad behavior will be defeated. God will be victorious. And, once again, the end times are now. It gives us all hope today.

Whatever struggles we are dealing with in life, whatever struggles we are dealing with as Americans or as the people of Wyoming today, God is victorious. Love wins. When there is bad, good will prevail, that is, if you do your work as disciples. God requires us to be part of and active in the plan. If you do not reach out in love to people, they may never know the love of God, they may never know Jesus. It is up to you and no one else. Consider this your Call. Today is your day.

Dine and fellowship with each other, or build community – no discrimination.
Cure the sick. Care for each other. Do not rely on someone else to do the work. You do it. We do it.

Proclaim the word of the Lord. People need hope in this broken world. It is up to you, up to us, to speak up. Do not remain silent.

St. Christopher's Vestry Dinner – The start of a new community, one that was broken over 60 years ago. We both decided to separate. (Marty Hartzog and Mike Smith)