

Before our Winter Residents returned last year, having been with you 2 years, and all of us attempting to put COVID behind us, as Pastor, I drafted what I thought was “Casting A Vision” and sent this to several leaders of our church to encourage their buy-in. At that time, I was trying to envision how we could pay for both the Parking Lot, purchase of the Solar Panel System, future needs for a new Roof and others. But in very short order, Laborers in our Vineyard demonstrated that they were fully prepared to provide for the Solar System, the Parking Lot, Landscaping and Roofing, and began investigating what may be needed in our future. WELL DONE GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANTS OF GOD! In the midst of the most severe Pandemic in human history, You have cared for one another and our church. Thank You!

Then I read these words from Jesus this morning, recognizing Jesus has already “Cast The Vision” for us! After gathering the 12, ministering to these to develop their community of caring for one another, Jesus sent them out into the world in pairs, declaring “The Harvest is plentiful but the Laborers are few!” Whether there were exactly 70 or 72 we do not know, in the book of Genesis, these numbers are symbolic for the number of different nations in the world. So rather than just a ministry to their own people in Palestine and Samaria, this is Commissioning all of you for the journeys we have out in the world.

Perhaps you are going home, to Quail Creek or Amado, and there are neighbors there to be cared for... Possibly you volunteer at Crossroads in Nogales, or with the Cleft Palate Ministry at St. Andrews... You may be preparing for a trip to Minnesota or Connecticut, Michigan or Washington State to see family. Recognize that in relationship to God, we are not simply going through the motions of life,... trying to get ahead of everyone else, BUT rather that you are being sent out into the world, commissioned to care for others, to minister to their needs. Often times, I ache remembering a mentor whom I loved, that had gotten to a time where the high point of his day was What was for dinner, or the Manhattan before eating. We are not simply cattle grazing through life! You were Baptized for ministry, you have been CALLED by GOD, the Harvest is plentiful and Laborers are few! Ironically, for the last hundred years, there have been questions of whether traditional ministry is dead whether the Church is dead; when what Jesus described, what I firmly believe, is there is incredible need and our community of faith uniquely designed to minister! The world is a hostile place, and we are sent out as sheep among wolves, so be wise, be careful, but do not let fear stop you.

Jesus gives four specific directions for us:

We, as laborers are to Gather the Harvest. We do not need to create the harvest! We do not need to make things happen. In fact, the harvest of God’s creation is so immense, we need to pray for others to join us! God is responsible for GROWTH of our communities, all we need do is to be open to this growth, to plan for it, to anticipate growth, instead of impeding God by standing in the way.

Second, “inescapable vulnerability” is implicit in our Calling. You were not given extensive training for every circumstance. We were not even allowed to take food for the journey, a staff, extra shoes or work clothes.

Most of us know of the fabulous work Doctors Without Borders do volunteering throughout the world. We were surprised when our son was in College, that there is a similar program for Engineering Students to volunteer in other parts of the world. When he and a partner were in Uganda, we learned that they were prohibited from taking anything with them, the idea was not to bring all the stuff we have in America, or to purchase answers, but instead to LISTEN, to CARE, to use your ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION and EXPERIENCE to respond. They were at an Orphanage, where the Director of the Orphanage cooked all of the meals for all of the children over an open fire. Making matters more difficult, she had one infant strapped to her chest and a second to her back as she worked, and the open fire was

not a wood fire or gas fire, but the burning of dried manure. As she worked, all of the smoke rose in her face and that of these infants. So, they taught making clay bricks and built a fireplace with cooktop to use as a stove, channeling the smoke up the chimney; and for good measure they added a metal tank on the backside of the chimney to act as a hot water heater. Take nothing with you for the journey, neither staff, shoes or clothes. Use your FAITH, ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION, EXPERIENCE to LISTEN AND CARE.

The only things you are given as Christians for the journey are 1) your Baptism in Jesus Christ, 2) Communion with God and One Another, and 3) Faith that anything is possible, even life after death. There are killers out there, terrorists wanting to spread fear, there are those wanting to tear down and destroy. There are wolves. But we do not need to fear, Our purpose is to bless all houses we enter! What a great job! Even when rejected, we are not to offer curses or retribution (remember Jesus rebuke of James and John for wanting to call down fire upon those who would not listen). Jesus declares that God's Peace is sufficient to rest upon every household that will value and cultivate peace; and where they will not, the peace will return to God. Most of us have been so well trained at giving rather than receiving, pay attention to the implicit challenge to be vulnerable: You are to receive whatever others are willing to offer. When I was about 13 or 14, we went on a Mission Trip to Cow Creek, Kentucky in a very remote part of Appalachia, to offer our labors for those in need. About the third night, we were invited to a family's home for supper. The food was very meager beans and a cup of water. The water we drank smelled of sulfur, but we recognized that this was all that this family had to feed themselves for a month, which they shared freely with us, to express their joy and thanksgiving one night.

Third, the successes of the 70, your successes, are far greater than you will ever know. When she was on her deathbed, Billie Youngblut gave me a poem, which she said had come from someone homeless on the street. The poem said:

“When you smile, you gift that smile to others.  
When you share a dream, you allow others to dream that dream as well.  
When you reveal tears, and offer your embrace, you give the world pieces of yourself that no one else has ever given.”

What the 70 did, were minor compared to Jesus, AND YET, they changed the world. Without these living out their faith, no one would have remembered the execution of a Carpenter Rabbi from Nazareth...

There is always more happening in life, than what we perceive.

Recognize: The words that you speak, the actions you take, are modeling for others how to respond to you, and how to live. Know that when ever you act in mercy and compassion, you are announcing the Kingdom of God to the world, you are challenging the dominance of evil in this world, you are extending God's blessings in reality.

Steven Sondheim in the Musical “Into the Woods” described

“Careful the things you say, Children will listen. Careful the things you do, Children will see and learn. Children may not obey, but children will listen. Children will look to you for which way to turn.”

PERHAPS most importantly, there is yet something more...

Jesus announced to those going out into the world: “I have given you authority... over all the power of the enemy, and Nothing will hurt you. But do not rejoice at this, that evil spirits submit to you, Rejoice that Your names are Written in heaven!”

More than anything else, is knowing you have an eternal relationship with God! This relationship is yours by Grace because you are simultaneously: RECIPIENTS of, HERALDS to, and integral PARTS of the GRACE, MERCY and LOVE of God, personified in Christ Jesus.