

**Luke 10:1-20 (Fourth Sunday after Pentecost—Series C)**  
**“Serving and Witnessing in a Hostile World”**  
**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield, CT**  
**July 3, 2022**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the Gospel Lesson appointed for today, from Luke 10:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. <sup>9</sup> Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' <sup>12</sup> I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. <sup>13</sup> "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>14</sup> But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>15</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. <sup>16</sup> "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me." <sup>17</sup> The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" <sup>18</sup> And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup> Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

“Behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves,” Jesus said to the seventy-two. If you were one of their number, how would you feel about that? You know what wolves do to lambs, don’t you? They sneak up on the defenseless creatures and kill and eat them. Being a lamb in the middle of a pack of hungry wolves is a death sentence.

“I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves,” Jesus also says to you and to me. Yes, Jesus’ words to the seventy-two are also His words to His Twenty-First Century

believers. How do you feel about that? You know what wolves do to lambs! Yet that is the reality for us Christians as we bear witness to the Lord of our lives. As Christians, baptized believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior from Satan, sin, and death, Jesus sends us with the Gospel of His death and resurrection out into the hostile world like lambs in the middle of a pack of wolves.

That is reality for us as believers in Jesus. Thus far, it is a reality which we who live in the United States have, for the most part, been spared. However, since we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we also know that this country is becoming rapidly more hostile to Christ and His Church. We are going to see and feel this reality of being lambs in the midst of wolves, as our Lord said we would. Nevertheless, as Jesus sent out the seventy-two, so He still sends us out as lambs in the midst of wolves.

There is a great need in our world and especially in our country. It is the need for faith and trust in Jesus Christ. It is the need for salvation that Jesus only gives: rescue from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The need for Jesus and His salvation is just as great today as it was in the First Century when Jesus told the seventy-two, "The harvest is plentiful." The world needs Jesus Christ. The world needs the salvation He won through His death and resurrection so that they might rejoice with us in the glories of heaven. But Jesus said, "the workers are few." Jesus' desire, then, is to send out more laborers into the harvest fields with the Gospel news of forgiveness and everlasting life which are the Lord's gifts to people through the death and resurrection of Jesus. "Plead to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest," Jesus admonishes. Yet, it is dangerous in the field.

That's why Jesus warned the seventy-two, "I am sending you as lambs in the midst of wolves." Jesus plainly suggests that they will be rejected and suffer the consequences of announcing the presence of the reign and rule of God which has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They will receive hostility from the world and will suffer violence against them. And as Christians who go out into the world to live our lives in Jesus' name, so will we.

In 2017, Family Research Council and the Liberty Institute found a rising pattern of hostility toward Christians in America over the past decade. In a 140-page "Survey of Religious Hostility in America" it was noted that—

- Matthew Reynolds, valedictorian for HLV Jr.-Sr. High School in Victor, Iowa, was told he had to give a 'secular' speech after he wished to attribute his success to his faith in Jesus Christ during his graduation speech.
- A cross was removed from a veterans' memorial in San Diego, after the US Court of Appeals for the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit held that the memorial was unconstitutional.
- Dr. Frank Turek, a Cisco employee, was fired for expressing his views on traditional marriage in his book, even though he never voiced his religious opinions at work.
- In one place, city officials prohibited senior citizens from praying over their meals, listening to religious messages, or singing gospel songs at a senior activities center.
- A public school official physically lifted an elementary school student from his seat and reprimanded him in front of his classmates for praying over his lunch.
- A public university's law school banned a Christian organization because it required its officers to adhere to a statement of faith that the university disagreed with.

Like lambs in the midst of wolves so we are, my brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet this does not surprise us. Like the seventy-two, we go out and serve in the world in our various vocations, living lives of faith and witness in the world with full knowledge of the world's

hatred. We read in 1 John, "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1Jo 5:19). And yet we live our vocations out in the world. We go about life daily with full knowledge that we are indeed as lambs in the midst of wolves even as Jesus went to Jerusalem like a lamb led to the slaughter, with full knowledge of the cross. Our Lord Himself was "oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

Christ, the Lamb of God, was the sacrificial victim on the cross for the sins of the whole world. Jesus shed His own blood, covering over the sins of all people. He took upon Himself all of the world's imperfections, all our blemishes, and all our flaws. As Christ hung on the cross and bore the sins of the world, God turned His face from His only Son. He turned in horror from His beloved One. He abandoned His Son on the cross because He was bearing the unholiness of all people. Through the shed blood of Christ, our sins are washed clean. All the stains of sin have been removed from us. We are redeemed from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The Holy Spirit through the washing of water with the Word in Holy Baptism has given us the gift of saving faith and trust in Jesus as our only Savior from sin and death. He has made us into new creations, modeled after our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, who bids us in faith and trust, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

And so, we do follow our Lord and Master into the dangerous fields of the world's harvest. In doing so, our lives become for other models of Christ through what we say and

do, even as we proclaim and show Christ to the world that needs Him, His forgiveness, and love. As Christ was the Sacrificial Victim of the cross for the sins of the world, so you and I live and work and proclaim the Gospel in such a world and, if necessary, suffer as sacrificial victims of the Gospel. That is what we promised when we became confirmed members of the Lutheran Church. In our vows we promised, by the grace of God, to "live according to the Word of God, and in faith, words, and deed, to remain true to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even to death." We promised by the grace of God "to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it."

In making those promises we acknowledge that we are indeed lambs in the midst of wolves who are, nevertheless, **NOT** ashamed of Jesus Christ and His words. He leads His flock like a shepherd who always loves and cares for His sheep (Is. 40:11). The seventy-two were not dependent on themselves in their mission, for they brought nothing with them, no money, no backpack, no sandals. They were completely dependent on the Lord of the harvest to open the hearts of people to receive His messengers and to show them hospitality. As we live our lives of faith and witness in an ever increasingly hostile world, we do not depend on ourselves either. We, by the power of the Holy Spirit, place our trust in the Lord of the mission and His promise that our names are already written in the Book of Life because of our baptisms into Christ's death and resurrection. His cross guarantees the forgiveness of sins and our salvation and life everlasting. Christ's faithfulness to us lasts forever. Even should the wolves devour us in this world, we are victors in Christ because we have life

enteral, and we look forward to “the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”

As Christians, Jesus sends us with the Gospel of His cross and resurrection out into the hostile world like lambs in the midst of a pack of wolves. Yet He comes with us. We are not alone in our proclamation of word and action. The reign and rule of God is already a present reality in Christ and the kingdom of Satan is already firmly defeated by the victorious Lamb of God who is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. In our faithful proclamation of Jesus, no matter what we are told we cannot do or say about Him, the presence of the Risen Christ to redeem a lost and dying world ensures us that our Lord’s reign will triumph. Therefore, we will not fear. For even though Satan, through the world, will assault us for our faith and our proclamation in various ways, even to the point of our own deaths, we know that the victory is already ours in Jesus. In the words of the battle hymn of the Reformation, “And take they our life, / Goods, fame, child, and wife, / Though these all be gone, / Our victory has been one; / The Kingdom ours remaineth.” Amen.