



Setting the Alarm for 10:02

Sermon Series: Better Together: 40 Days of Community

Sunday, September 16, 2007
Reaching Out Together

Rev. Dr. David E. Gilbert
Scripture Lesson: Luke 10:1-12

**"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;
therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out
laborers into the harvest."**

-Luke 10: [NRSV]

Thirty years ago if you stood out in your front yard you could look at the houses on your street and probably say, "The people in that house are Methodists; the people in that house are Presbyterians; the people in the house over there are Baptists; and the folks in the house next to it are Roman Catholics." Increasingly today in neighborhoods across America you can stand on your street and say, "The people in that house are Methodist, and the people in that house are Presbyterian; and those in that house are

Catholic;" but you can also say, "The people in that house are Muslim; and the people in that house are Hindu; and the people in the next house to it are 'I don't know what', but on the back bumper sticker of their car they have a fish with the name 'Darwin' written inside it and this fish is swallowing up a smaller fish with the cross inside it representing the church."

This may not be the case so much here in Poland, but it is so more and more

across our country. Our neighborhoods are becoming more religiously diverse.

This morning we're continuing our 40-Day emphasis on "community" – that we are "Better Together."

We aren't of course to be a community unto ourselves, but a community/family of faith that reaches out to otherswith the Good News of God's love.

But how do we do that today when the people around us many times seem to be living in a different world from us?

A Presbyterian elder in an evangelism workshop penned his thoughts this way: He said:

"In the midst of this crazy world I look around and wonder what has happened. How do I talk to a kid with a ring in his nose? Does the 'Old Rugged Cross' mean anything to him? From where I can tell he's from another planet, from Mars. Or am I the stranger around here? How do I tell a Martian about Jesus...when the only language I speak is 1955? How do I write a headline for him that doesn't screw up the Good News? I kinda wish it was the way it was, but it's not, so I've got to figure out how to sing the old lyrics with a whole new tune."

Is there a way of singing a new tune with the gospel for this new world so that people will sing along with us?

I'd like for us to go back to the oldest lyrics of all – the very words of Jesus – as he gives instructions to his disciples,

sending them out into the world. Would you reach for your Bible and open to Luke, chapter 10, verse 1-12? You will find it on page 54 of the New Testament in the Bible we've made available to you.

Now by way of background, in the previous chapter (chapter 9) Jesus has sent out his twelve disciples, two-by-two, into the world, and they go out into Israel. Now today in this passage in Luke 10 he gathers a larger group of disciples --70 disciples -- and sends them out two-by-two into the neighboring region of Samaria. Let's look and see the words that He gives to them:

10After 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. ²He 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. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain 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.

(I think what He's saying here is, "Don't go around and presume on the hospitality of a lot of people. Don't move from house to house sort of skimming the cream from people, but stay in a house where you are offered lodging.)

Verse 8:

⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹"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." ¹²I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

Here ends the reading.

What we have here a lot of people would say is the *optional, extra-credit* part of being a Christian. "All I really have to do is accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. But then if I want the special, gold-lapel pin someday I can go out and serve as a missionary in the world."

Friends, I hope you won't be offended in my saying this – but that kind of thinking is just plain wrong-headed! Did you know that in the Bible God only goes to people because He has a place for them to serve Him in the world?

Remember God's going to Moses? One day Moses is on the mountain there in the desert and he sees a fiery bush and a voice comes to him and says, "Moses, accept me into your heart. And then if you get a little extra time call me up and I'll put you to work in some community service."

No, God didn't say that, did He? What He said was – what God said was, -- "Moses, I've got a problem! GO!" – (or as they say down south, "*You git!*") --

"You goto Pharoahand tell him to let my people go!"

And then later there came a young boy who was the youngest of twelve brothers – David, -- and God said, "Go! Pick up five rocks and bring down that giant in my power."

Later still, there was a young woman, unmarried, a virgin (probably just a teen)– Mary – and God said, "Mary, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will bear a child and you shall name him Jesus." For Mary to bear a child in her circumstances was a radical way of "going out."

And then later on there was a terrorist, who came walking into Damascus and God came and slapped him to the ground and that man got up, staggering to his feet with dust in his mouth, and he looked into a piercing light and God said, "Saul, can you type? I need letters written to all the cities in the Mediterranean area. I want you to be the master-mind of my missionary movement."

God comes to you and He has a place in the world for you to serve.

And now He says to these seventy, "GO! I am sending you out."

Well, how does He send us out?
How did He send them out?

He does it I think in three ways that are surprising, but which are, I think, the very ways God sends us out into the new world in which we find ourselves today. The first way we see here is that Jesus sends out His disciples saying, "I send

you out as *lambs among wolves*.” That is, “I want you to go out and be *defenseless*.”

Sheep among wolves are defenseless, aren't they? Does Jesus mean that we're to go out there and just let ourselves be eaten up, let ourselves to be abused and beaten up? No. What then? What's He driving at? Well, when wolves are around lambs they let their guard down; they open up. What Jesus is saying is, “I send you out in a way -- I want you to be *disarming*.—I don't want you to threaten people; I want you to be a pilgrim who walks alongside other people.

I read recently a man named Bob give a recollection of something that happened when he was in college a few years ago. He was part of a Christian group on a large university campus. They decided they were going to bring to the campus a very famous scholar/evangelist/Christian speaker who would be the advocate for the Christian faith on that secular university campus. They found the date and they booked him and chose to have the lecture at the largest lecture hall there on the campus.

Bob said he immediately started panicking, thinking, “Oh my goodness, what if this guy doesn't deliver the goods? Wouldn't it be ironic, terrible for the Christians to sponsor a Christian event with a Christian speaker and wind up humiliating the Christians?” And so he began to worry about that.

Well, the night came when the speaker was going to be there, and he left his dorm and he was worried about hundreds of students seeing this debacle. And as he was walking along he noticed people were walking the other direction

and thought, “Oh my goodness. No one's going to show up!” But he turned a corner and he looked and he saw long lines of students streaming into this lecture hall. In fact, he walked in and even found a difficult time getting a place to sit.

He sat down and the student who was the introducer stood up and gave a glowing introduction of this speaker – we'll call him “*Dr. Calvin*” – and listed his half dozen degrees and the impressive books he'd written and the academic posts he's held across the United States.

Then Dr. Calvin rose to his feet and Bob just smiled. He said this man had a blazing intellect. He was articulate and for an hour he cascaded reasons why Christianity is superior to all other religions or philosophies. And he ended up closing with a dramatic story of his own conversion.

When he was done Dr. Calvin asked, “Are there any questions?” And Bob said, “Oh, this is great! Whoa!” And then he thought, “Oh no, questions. – an X factor.” Somebody could ask him a question out of left field and it could just undermine the Christian faith and so he was worried about that.

But he didn't have to worry because the first student to ask a question had a clipboard and had the question all written out. He asked this somewhat hostile question and Dr/ Calvin just answered it smooth as silk as if he'd answered it a hundred times.

Next person was a woman who kind of had bushy hair and she stood up and she challenged him, and he handled that with the same kind of aplomb.

On and on it went and finally it was time for one last question. The last questioner was obviously a graduate student who had a big beard and he stood up there asking this question that went on and on and on. And as he went further his voice got higher and higher, and he started to rail against the Bible and rail against Christianity and then rail against Dr. Calvin himself. Then he finished and he crossed his arms like this.

Dr. Calvin looked at him and said, "Now, let me ask you this: Do you want me to answer which of the two possibilities that are raised by the implications of your question? Is it "Option A" or "Option B"?"

And this student wasn't aware that he was raising two questions, but he said, "Option A."

Then Dr. Calvin very skillfully said, "Well, is it "Option A-1" or "Option A-2"?"

And the student, very disturbed now, said, "Oh I don't know --- "Option A-2!"

Then Dr. Calvin said, "Well, is it "Option A-2 Alpha" or "Option A-2 Beta"?"

By this time there was a murmur going through the crowd, and what had happened was that Dr. Calvin had very brilliantly boxed this student in, so that any of the six options he had proposed was somehow going to contradict some part of the argument he had already made. The student was just flummoxed and he finally said, "I don't know."

And Dr. Calvin said, "Quite. Quite."

He smiled triumphantly, turned to the student-introducer and the student jumped up and said, "Well, let's have a big hand for Dr. Calvin and his great presentation this evening!" Everybody started applauding. Bob said he walked out with a big grin saying, "Wow! What a triumphant night for God!"

Only, as he was walking out he found himself walking behind two female students. And as they were walking out, before they got out of earshot, he heard one of those female students say to the other, "He may be right! But he is one SOB and I hate his guts!"

And Bob says he spent the rest of that night walking around aimlessly on the campus just thinking.

To share Christ is very complex. And very often you can win the battle, but in the end --- if you're not careful -- you're going to lose the war!

Have you ever had an argument with someone -- a religious argument -- and you just squashed them? Has anyone ever said back to you, "Oh, I think you're right. Hey sign me up to be baptized."

No, they haven't done that, have they?

And very often -- if we're not careful -- we'll drive them even further away from the faith. This sort of over-powering artillery has never worked very well. And friends, today it doesn't work at all! As a matter of fact today people are so skiddish about being pressured about religious things, that if you're going to

talk about God you almost have to have the skills of a “horse-whisperer.”

Friends, that’s what Jesus is saying here in this text. He says, “I don’t want you to go out and clobber people. Don’t be offensive.” He says, “Don’t even be defensive. I send you out as *defenseless lambsamong wolves.*”

There’s a second way He sends us out here in this text. He sends us out to be *authentic* and *transparent* people, living our real lives around others.

Look at verse 7: “*Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide.*” Well, if you’re just living in a house with people you are going to be transparent. People are going to see who you really are. And Jesus says “That’s a good thing! Let people see who you really are.”

Last Thursday night I was with the choir in their annual kick-off dinner party. The mood was happy, spirited, boisterous even. One of the choir members said of the choir. “You get really known here. You can’t put on airs.” When you went away to school and first lived with a couple of different roommates you might try to be a certain way, but eventually the real you is going to show through. That’s the way it needs to be. It’s what Jesus is commending here. That’s what He is saying to us here. In those times when we are with people – and a time opens up in which to speak of faith and life – let the real you shine through; be open and transparent and real.

Be authentic and real
as you walk alongside other people.

And then there’s a third way
that God sends us out.

He says, “As you go out, be *focused.*”

There’s a sense of urgency that pervades this passage. Jesus has just sent out his twelve disciples in the last chapter and now he gathers seventy together and he sends them out two-by-two. If you do the math between the two chapters Jesus has now 41 teams of two that are out there in the world and we think “Wow, He’s got 41 teams that are out there sweeping the countryside. Isn’t that great?” And Jesus says, “It’s way too few.” He says, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are so few. I don’t have enough workers. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send workers into the harvest.*”

That was a classic text generations ago preachers would use to get people to go into full-time ministry to be pastors and missionaries. But friends, what this passage is really about is – It’s about Christians in the world – you and me -- wherever we are – catching fire and getting white-hot in their witness to Jesus Christ.

If you knew the cure for cancer would you keep it to yourself? If you knew how to cure AIDS would you say, “You know, I’m too shy to share that with people?” Friends, you know the secret of life! You know the purpose for which human beings are on this planet! And we dare not keep that to ourselves.

Vic Pentz, a Presbyterian pastor in Atlanta, says a man walked into the church one Sunday morning with two casts on his arms, two broken wrists.

Vic asked, "What happened?" And this man said that he had been in a car accident -- admitted that he had hit a woman in an intersection. He said that even though his wrists were broken he crawled out of the car and went to this woman who was pinned in her car. When he got to the woman, he asked, "Are you okay?" And this woman said, "I think I'll be fine!" And then, -- get this, -- she asked him, "Hey, do you have a church home?"

"Now that's on fire for God!"
Crash evangelism!
A sense of urgency about the harvest.

The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. That, my friends, is Luke 10:2. Did you know that there's actually a movement of young Christians in the world today called the "**10:2 Movement**"? And these young Christians set their computers and they set their cell-phones and watches for an alarm at 10:02 every day. And they stop and they pray that Christians --- wherever they are in the world at that moment -- would love the people around them in a way that opens them to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

10:2.

What would happen if we did that -- if we set our alarm and said that kind of prayer? What would happen if *you* did that? I can tell you what I think would happen with me. I'd start praying it, thinking about -- asking God -- to send people out. But after praying like that for awhile, my prayer would subtly begin to shift and I'd start to think and pray about those places and people with whom God

might be asking me to go out. Might that not happen with you?

So, let me conclude by summing up. My friends, as you go out into this world....

- Be as defenseless as lambs,
- Be open and vulnerable and live your real life before the world,
- And stay focused in a way that you give glory to Godevery day.

Would you join with me in prayer?

Heavenly Father, it really is a whole new world out there -- a world that is a lot less religious and a lot more complex than it's ever been for us before. But Lord it is a world that is just as hungry for love and truth and grace -- your grace -- as it ever has been. And Lord, in these moments today we, your people, open our hearts to you in a new way, surrendering ourselves to be used by you -- wherever you place us this week. We would be instruments of your love and your power in the lives of the people all around us. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.