



**Luke 9:1-11, 12-17**

**“Facing The Impossible With The Invisible”**

November 24, 2013

Last Sunday After Pentecost: Christ the King

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**“Following Christ from City Center”**

VIIIA,B: LUKE 9:1-17 "FACING THE IMPOSSIBLE WITH THE INVISIBLE"

A. 9:1-11 SENDING OF THE TWELVE ON KINGDOM MISSION AS HIS EXTENSIONS.

1) vv.1-6 Jesus Sends Them Out With His Own Authority (Twelve Healing Apostles).

Preach + Heal

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//Mk. 6:6b-13, Mt. 10:1-14, Transition: They Observed Him, He Now Sends Them

a) vv.1-2 Commissioning and Sending //10:1-16, "Power and Authority" (4:14, 36,5:17,6:19,8:46,Acts 2:22,10:38)

And he called **the Twelve** together 12 Tribes = Symbol Of Israel Renewed, Judas Included!

and gave them **power** and authority over **ALL** demons **and to cure diseases**, 7:22, 8:43, 46, Acts 1:8, Holy Spirit

and he **sent them out** (*apostello*) to **preach the kingdom of God and to heal**. 8:1, 6:13, Called, Sent, Word + Deed

Kingdom Preaching/Healing (4:18, 40-44, 6:17-18, 8:1-2)

b) v.3 Mission Speech No. 1: Provisions Stripped/ Highly Vulnerable (Day and Night).

And he said to them, They Are The Equipment! Mk. 6:8-9

"Take nothing for **your** journey: **no** staff, nor bag, **nor bread**, nor money (silver); Travel Light, Vulnerable

and do not have two tunics. Urgency/Solidarity, For Sleeping Outdoors

1:78, If No Open Doors, They Are Hungry/Exposed

b') vv.4-5 Mission Speech No. 2: Hospitality and Rejection/ Receptivity (22:35-36).

+ And **whatever** house you enter, stay there, **and from there depart**. No Shopping Around: //2 Tim. 3:6

- And **wherever** they do not receive you, when you leave that town Reject Messenger/Message/Sender

shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." Symbolic Warning: //Acts 13:51

Didache 11-12. Lk. 4:28-30

a') v.6 Obedience In Departure and Mission.

Jesus' Reach Extended Through His Disciples

And they departed and **went through the villages**, Fulfills 5:10 "Catching People," 6:12-16

**preaching the gospel and healing everywhere**. Prophetic Succession, It Worked!!

Previews Acts: Power/Preach + Heal, Accept + Reject, Mk. 6:14-16

2) vv.7-9 Herod Raises A Theological Question: Curiosity And Resurrection Power.

a Now Herod **the tetrarch** heard of **ALL** that was done, **and he was perplexed**, 8:3, 13:31, Herod's Perplexity

b **because it was** said by some that John had been raised from the dead, 7:16-17, , Kingdom Power

c by some that Elijah **had appeared**, Government Opposition Is Ahead!

c' and by others that one of the old prophets **had risen**. Prophetic Categories

b' Herod said, "John I beheaded, Mk. 6:17-29, Lk. 7:36-50, 8:25, 9:18-20

a' **but who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he sought to see him**. 23:6-12, Herod's Quest: Status

Who Is This? 5:21, 7:19, 7:49, 8:25, 28

1') vv.10-11 Return of The Twelve and Display of Jesus' Love and Authority (Mk. 6:30-32).

On their **return** **the apostles** ("sent out" ones-*apostoloi*) told him what they had done. 1:1, Debriefing /Review

And he took them and withdrew apart **to a city called Beth-saida**. Post- Mission Retreat, Outside Herod's Turf

**When the crowds learned it, they followed him; and he welcomed them** Jesus' Gracious Welcome of Crowds

and spoke to them of **the kingdom of God**, and cured those who had need of **healing**. Ministry in Word/Deed

Preaching/Healing/Sacrament Go Together

B. 9:12-17 JESUS' GLORY REVEALED IN THE FEEDING OF THE 5000+ . Mk. 6:30-44

Gift Miracle, All 4 Gospels, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kingdom Scene

1) vv.12-14 The Problem: Too Little Food.

Ex. 16, Num. 11, 2 Kgs. 4:42-44, Ps. 78:19-20

a Now the day began to wear away; and **the Twelve** came and said to him, Frustration! Time for Action!

"Send **the crowd** away, to go into the villages and country round about, **to lodge** and get provisions;

**(for we are here** in a lonely (i.e. desert) place. Their Practical Plan + Reason: Part 1

b But he said to them, "You (yourselves) give them something to eat." His Illogical Command

a' They said,

"**We have no more than** five loaves and two fish- unless we are to go and buy food for **ALL** **this** people.

**(For there were about** five thousand men.) Army! Their Logical Plan + Reason: Part 2

b' **And he said to his disciples**, "Make them sit down in companies, about fifty each." Command

And they did so, and made them all sit down. Obedient Helpers

Jesus Provides For Crowds Through His Disciples

2) v.16 Jesus' Eucharistic Prayer: Four-Fold Action (22:19-20, 24:30). Ex.16:4-36

a And **taking** the five loaves and the two fish Taking the Offering (1)

b,c he looked up to heaven, and **blessed** and **broke** them, Gesture + Jewish Blessing (2) + Break (3)

d and **gave** (kept giving) them to the disciples to set before the crowd. He Provides; They Serve! Give (4)

Authority As Service: Leaders Go First/ Eat Last

1') v.17 Solution: More Than Enough Food. 6:21, 38, 13:23-30, One for Each (Abundance)

And **ALL** ate and were satisfied. And they took up **what was left over**, **twelve** baskets of broken pieces.

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 9:1-17

With Luke 9:1-50 we begin a new essay of six thought units in a concentric patterns with a double center (a-b-c-c'-b'-a'). It opens with a success in mission (A. 9:1-11) and closes with a parallel failure in mission and discipleship (A' 9:37-50). The terms *demon* (v.1//vv.42,49) and *heal* (vv.2, 6, 11//v.42) serve as inclusions for the whole. The next inward layer gives two demonstrations of Jesus' glory, first in the feeding of the 5000 ( B. 9:12-17), then in the transfiguration (B' 9:28-36), each of which begins with a distinctive time signature, "Now as day was beginning to wear away" (v.12a) // "Now about eight days after these saying" (v.28a). The Moses who fed the people in the wilderness now appears with Elijah to prepare Jesus for his own exodus. At the core is the revelation that Jesus is a dying and rising Messiah (C. 9:18-22) and that his followers must walk his path of self-denial if they are not to be dismissed as unworthy at the kingdom's coming (C'9:23-27). The title *Son of man* (v.21//v.26) links the two central units. Titles for Jesus (*Christ of God, Son of man; My Son, My Chosen; Teacher*) are scattered throughout (vv.20, 21, 26, 35, 38, 44). Luke is a careful editor who is building up a layered portrait of Jesus mission.

The sending (A1. vv.1-6) and return (A1' vv.10-11) of the twelve from their short-term mission brackets the perplexed reaction of Herod, "but *who is this* about whom I hear such things" (A2. vv.7-9)? *Who is this* questions are a Lukan favorite to provoke reflection on Jesus' (5:21, 7:19, 7:49, 8:25). The sending of the twelve as Jesus' agents marks a turning point. Having watched him operate because they were called to be *with him* (8:1), he now sends them with his delegated *power and authority* (4:36, 5:17, 6:19, 8:46), which is a temporary endowment of Holy Spirit and his gifts. Observers now become co-belligerents. They are to announce the arrival of God's reign, as Jesus did (8:1), then demonstrate it in the restoration of human beings from two major effects of the fall: sickness and the torment of evil angels, just as Jesus did (8:2-3). What they saw in him now happens through them. To demonstrate their radical trust in the invisible resources Jesus supplies, they are to strip down and travel light. Self-protection and self-provision are excluded from the experiment. They are to stay where they find welcome, not trade up to better quarters because of the blessings they bring (v.3); they are not social climbers. Those who reject them and the One who sent them are warned of consequences in a symbolic act of judgment (v.5). Their obedience brings amazing results (v.6), and, on their return, there's a debriefing session (v.10a) and an attempt at retreat (v.10b). Even here the needy crowds find them. And what does Jesus do? He welcomes them and again puts the kingdom and its benefits on full display. Word (preaching the kingdom) and Deed (healing) interpret one another. This is also a discipleship lesson. Even when we are tired, God is still at his best. The Herod interlude (A2. vv.7-9) serves several functions. It marks time during the mission; it alerts us Jesus was interpreted in prophetic categories; it reminds us that spiritual power challenges political power; it prepares us for those powers to soon turn on Jesus. Herod gets his wish in 23:6-12.

The next thought unit (B. 9:12-17) begins with a time signature, "Now the day began to wear away...." Everyone's been healed (v.11), but now there's another problem: everyone's starving! The disciples, in their great wisdom, offer Jesus a practical plan to scatter the hungry masses (v.12b) to which he responds abruptly, "You feed them!" Their complaint (v.13b) shows they think only of human resources, but Jesus does the impossible with the invisible. Having just participated in the powers of the kingdom, they are now demoted back to crowd control (vv.14b-15). Jesus then takes the meager supplies and plays the host at a banquet: he takes, blesses, breaks and gives because he has a word from above. All are satisfied; there's even a basket left for each of the twelve waiters. Following Jesus is no guarantee we will look good, but our needs will be met as we obey. Following him is an amazing education.

## FACING THE IMPOSSIBLE WITH THE INVISIBLE

*“And he called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases.”*

### LUKE 9:1

Jesus is serious about sharing his stuff with followers.

A mysterious bond forms between people who share adversity. At a deep level they *belong* to one another. So it is in *The Plague* by French philosopher Albert Camus. The people of the Oran knew they were in for something dreadful when the rats came out of the dark places to die in the streets, and when, once the rats were all dead, the citizens began to die in the same way as a thousand a week were hauled to the city dump. The town was quarantined; no one in or out.

Dr. Bernard Rieux was caught in the plague, but it never occurred to him to try to get out, even though he longed to join his wife, who happened at the time to be a patient in a resort in the country.

The journalist Raymond Rambert was also caught in Oran and wanted out. "Why should I stay?" he asked Dr. Rieux. "I'm different from the rest of the people; I don't belong here." But he was stuck. For nothing better to do, he began to go with Dr. Rieux on his rounds to make the dying a little less horrible and save some children. He pitched in, doing whatever he could do to help people die with dignity.

One day a smuggler offered Rambert a chance to get out for a price, but he surprised Rieux by staying. "Why stay?" Rieux asked. "Your happiness is waiting in Paris. You have every *right* to be happy. And you certainly cannot be happy here."

Rambert's answer to the smuggler gives insight into why people keep commitments: "Until now," he said, "I always felt a stranger in this town, that I had no concern with you people. But now I *belong* here whether I want it or not." Rambert and Rieux were in the same boat; they were committed because they belonged.<sup>1</sup> And because he belonged in a way as never before, Rambert risked death.

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<sup>1</sup> Camus story retold by Lewis Smedes, *Caring and Commitment* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1988), 16-17.

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What happened between Dr. Rieux, Raymond Rambert, and the dying people of Oran is a window into the bond of respect and love that developed between Jesus and his associates. From Jesus' perspective the world was also under a plague: sin, disease, evil, and death were pandemic. As God's physician, he offers an antidote to any who will take the medicine of repentance and receive the benefits of forgiveness, physical healing if needed and deliverance from spiritual oppression where necessary. Like Rambert with Dr. Rieux, the disciples followed Jesus around, doing what they could to help. They could have left at any time and returned to family and work. They did not, and in the sharing of Jesus' friendship and mission they found themselves belonging to him and one another at a deep level. He invited them into what God was doing in the world, and a bond of love and trust was formed.

The developmental curriculum of an infant is to eat, mess up diapers, cry, and sleep. The curriculum of a small child is to play and interact with the world through the growing tool of language. The curriculum of teenagers is to spend endless hours on emotional roller coasters, looking in mirrors and wondering who they are. The curriculum of adults is to love and to work till we die. The curriculum of the Twelve was to be with Jesus, to observe and travel and learn. Now that they had been *with him* in close relationship for a season, it was time to share the overflow.<sup>2</sup> The number of kingdom outlets went from one to thirteen. More were healed and freed. The Jesus who by human limits could only be in one place at a time found a way to extend himself through his apprentices. What he was doing was transferable! We have forgotten that the Spirit of the One we worship can work through us as well.

The day came when they were no longer observers, watching Jesus *do the stuff*;<sup>3</sup> he no promoted them as partners in his enterprise. He gave regular folk a piece of the action, *a dose of the Holy Ghost* as the Pentecostals say, an array of spiritual gifts which are the tools of the trade. Their early apprentice days are over; they now become journeymen in the vocation of fishing for men and women. To this point Jesus had taken all the shots; now he makes assists and cheers for them as they run

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<sup>2</sup> On the process of show and tell, then send and debrief that Jesus used to equip his followers in the ways of the kingdom, see Alexander Venter, *Doing Healing: how to minister God's kingdom in the power of the spirit* (Johannesburg, SA: Vineyard International Press, 2009), Chapter 10, "Practitioners 1," 157-172, especially 161-162. For an accessible book on the process of disciple-making, ancient and modern, see Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Spring, CO: NavPress, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> A favorite phrase of the Vineyard Movement for the works of the kingdom.

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plays and score. Jesus the star becomes Jesus the player-coach. They watched *him do it* while they engaged in crowd management; now *they do it* with him close by; one day they will do it with him watching *from heaven* and the church will be launched. It is taught and caught, modeled and practiced; it is experimental and messy.

And so two millennia later we hang around a building on Sundays being entertained by inspiring choirs and receiving pep talks from preachers, thinking it makes us *good Methodists*.<sup>4</sup> I'm been at this a long time, and I'm not sure anymore. When compared to what Jesus did with the Twelve, it looks pretty lame. Did you know that people can come to our churches for years, think themselves faithful because we've set the bar so low, and never learn some of the most basic skills: *how to study the Scriptures for personal growth, how to tithe and receive from God, how to fast, how to pray for the lost and the sick, how to share your faith, how to deal with sin in your life, how to use spiritual gifts, how to hear from God, how to enter spiritual warfare, how to care for others?* Christian discipleship is more than sit-and-soak. It involves learning skills, then practicing them in a living laboratory where it's OK to fail and where encouragement is lavish. So don't ask me if I'm doing a good job as a solo pastor; ask if I have a process for training others. Don't ask me if I've visited Aunt Susie in the hospital; ask me if I have taken someone *with me* to visit Aunt Susie so they can learn how to make a hospital visit. Despite what you've been told, I'm not here as the hired hand to *do it for you*; I'm here to model it, to succeed grandly and fail miserably in public view, to get laughed at and gossiped about, to give away everything God has given me so that we, the people of God, may be equipped for every good work and give the devil a black eye in Greenwood.

TV has spoiled us, made us a nation of spectators. Everything looks easy on the screen, that is until you try it. Someone has defined a pro football as seventy thousand who desperately need exercise cheering for and criticizing twenty-two who desperately need rest. That's the church! Pew Potatoes, God's Frozen Chosen, a few Church Pillars who hold the place up and more Church Caterpillars who crawl in and out on Sunday. "Here I am, Lord; please send someone else." A church of good people, but few who are trained to help broken people find Christ.

But don't feel badly about it. Blame us pastors and those who trained us. It's our fault. It's sixty years of the professionalization of pastoral ministry and of a

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<sup>4</sup> The classic here in our tradition is John Wesley's *The Character of a Methodist*, [new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/character](http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/character).

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Methodist system that values moving up the career ladder more than moving deeply into the lives of people and preparing them to be co-laborers. Methodism was the original lay-training movement. John Wesley stayed in trouble with the Church of England because he was willing to delegate major ministry responsibilities to the laity he trained to preach, teach and give pastoral care.<sup>5</sup>

Is it OK if we do it *the Jesus way* for a while? His way is to train and then release people to the Father’s guidance and the Spirit’s power. Let them succeed and fail and report back and continue learning. Quit thinking of me as a personal chaplain on-call-for-family-crises-and-ceremonial-occasions; think of me as the local training officer. I will still do the other stuff because it pays the rent and it’s in my cluttered job description, but it is not what I’m to be about. Jesus had a team. The devil doesn’t want us to be a team. Our recent history is against us. Our denominational culture is at present more hindrance than help. But we have to start somewhere, and I say *here*, and I say *now*, and *you and me*. This is not new, though it’s new for us. It is profoundly biblical and deeply in tune with our early Methodist roots. And now that I’ve rattled on a while, let’s see how Jesus did it. We have before us two case studies, *The Sending of the Twelve* and *The Feeding of the Five Thousand*.

**SENDING OF THE TWELVE ON MISSION (vv.1-11)**

Graduates of the police academy receive two important items, a gun and a badge. The gun is power; the badge is the authority to use it when necessary.<sup>6</sup> In Luke chapter nine, verse 1, the twelve are given the spiritual equivalents of a gun and a badge: “And Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them *power* and *authority* over all demons and to cure diseases.” The operative force here is the person and gifts of the Holy Spirit so the transfer is invisible. They are given a drink from his inner well; some of his gas goes into their tanks, some of his juice into their batteries. They are spiritually energized and temporarily gifted by the Holy Spirit for a specific task. And then, when basic training is over, the local Police Chief puts you out on patrol. Verse 2, “and he *sent them out* to preach the kingdom of God and to heal.” It’s one

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<sup>5</sup> For a brief review of Wesley’s accomplishment in lay ministry, see James L. Garlow, *Partners in Ministry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1998), 63-67. John Wesley trained 653 lay preachers during his half century of ministry. For a fresh treatment of Wesley’s message and methods, see Fred Sanders, *Wesley on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2013), exp. 37-42.

<sup>6</sup> On authority and power, see Venter, *Doing Healing*, 167-172.

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thing for us to acknowledge Jesus did this stuff; it's quite another to believe that Peter, and even Judas, did it as well.<sup>7</sup> Word and deed, demons and diseases, calling cards and divine credentials, putting the new world of God's merciful kingdom on local display. Ordinary men doing extraordinary work because of their relationship to Jesus. First they followed; now they represent him as personal ambassadors.<sup>8</sup>

Have you noticed, as I have, that we don't do much of this any more, or else we leave it to churches that are supposedly less sophisticated and more experiential in their approach? We preach everything but the inbreaking of God's kingdom and do everything but the stuff Jesus said was important. And the simplest answer to our neglect is that we haven't drunk from his well in a while.

Churches are busy places, and pastors like myself are experts at busyness. Someone said if I was Catholic you'd have to rename the church *Our Lady of Perpetual Motion*. But when we do it *the Jesus way*, things get simple and focused and risky and vulnerable. What he doesn't give to us, we don't have to give away. No faking it any longer. Our hands are empty. Let's be honest. Much of what I do as a pastor, and much of what we've been taught to do as church, is a sophisticated fog to cover up the fact that not much is happening that requires a loving Father and a risen Jesus and a outpoured Spirit to explain. Sometimes I find myself asking, "Why do I feel like a fraud?" I think I know the answer. Let me give you a dangerous prayer: "Lord Jesus, strip me down to the basics, and while you're at it, how about the church as well. Make us unbusy enough to hear from you. Give us a hunger for you and not just for stuff to keep religious people busy and distracted."

In order for the Twelve to *tote the gun* and *wear the badge* with integrity, Jesus stripped them of everything else in a grand experiment. First they left boats and nets on the shore; now there's a pile of money and personal belongings at Jesus' feet. No hidden energy bars or credit cards allowed. They were not to rely on visible supports and what they could provide for themselves. All items of status and security are left

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<sup>7</sup> See Graham Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), Chapter 6, "Luke-Acts," 129-156. The idea of being an ambassador is highlighted in the U.M. vows of baptism, "According to the grace given you, will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy church *and serve as Christ's representatives in the world*" (*U.M. Hymnal*: 34, No. 6)?

<sup>8</sup> On the delegation of spiritual authority, see Charles H. Kraft, *I Give You Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1997).

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behind. No staff for protection, no bag and no bread for the next meal, no silver to buy anything, and only one tunic, because a second functioned as a bedroll, and they were to stay with whoever invited them in. Nothing but their own Spirit-blessed humanity; they were now the equipment. Facing the pain of strangers and the fury of evil with nothing but God! If he doesn't come through, nothing happens and you look very dumb. You might even be injured. This is what it means to follow Jesus, and yet we pastors do nearly everything we can to avoid it. We want to look as good and slick and competent as all the other professionals we secretly envy because they have results to show for their work because ours is often so vague. We hide behind all the clutter of learning and ordination and supposed counseling expertise, knowing all the while our hands are empty. But maybe empty hands is a good place to start. No one left Jesus' presence that day without being stripped. All the clutter was left in a pile. "Not today, boys, it'll all be here when you get back."

This is a radical, short-term experiment. It had a beginning and an end, maybe a week or two.<sup>9</sup> They were to trust God's Spirit and trust that Jesus is not leading them to dead ends. Eventually they got all their stuff back. And yet, when I misplace my keys or my wallet or briefcase, my anxiety goes through the roof. At such times I am aware how terribly dependent I am on externals for a sense of identity and competence. How easy it is to trust what we provide for ourselves. Nothing wrong with being responsible about life, but when it comes to kingdom realities, the issue is not what I can do *by myself* or *for myself* as an autonomous individual, but what he can do *through me* and *with others*. Phillips Brooks wrote, "We never become truly spiritual by sitting down and wishing to become so. You must undertake something so great you cannot accomplish it unaided."<sup>10</sup> This is why people who go on short-term missions to other countries or even to an Emmaus weekend often come back changed. They've been placed outside their comfort zone and met God's grace and power in their vulnerability. Van Dunn writes:

"Ministry is not a human possibility. It is possible only in dependence upon God. Therefore, preparation for ministry does not consist in the development of inherent human possibilities but in the shedding of all illusions of self-sufficiency and independence so that the transcendent

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<sup>9</sup> That Luke notes that they *went through the villages... and healing everywhere* (v.6) implies more than a quick out and back.

<sup>10</sup> James Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1988), 188, 190.

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power of God may direct and sustain those who are called and sent."<sup>11</sup>

Verses 4 and 5 are the second part of Jesus' missionary instruction. He briefs them on how to behave when they enter a village. They are not to trade up for better accommodations but stay in the first place that welcomes them, "And whatever house you enter, *stay there*, and from there depart." They are to represent Jesus and his kingdom, not to ingratiate themselves and trade up in benefits.

Jesus' sobering news is some people and towns will refuse hospitality, even a hearing. Some will be receptive, others resistant, some good soil, others not so good.<sup>12</sup> When a village rejects the messengers and the sender, they are to enact a prophetic symbol. It was the custom of pious Jews to shake the dust off their feet when then entered back onto Jewish soil after a trip into pagan territory. They did not want the uncleanness of Gentile turf to accompany them into the homeland. It was a ritual of judgment, a statement God would judge the village. It is easy to preach the love of God and hard in our culture to warn people that to reject Jesus Christ means God will reject them. But the Christian message is judgment as well as grace, accountability as well as opportunity.<sup>13</sup> The disciples are to be content with what God provides; they are to preach and display the kingdom. And if whole towns are judged, it makes me wonder at what end of the scale Greenwood falls. Are we as a whole resistant to God's overtures, or are we receptive, and in which direction are we moving? Could the current plague of drugs and murders be a symptom that needs attention. Will we only get stirred up when it strikes one of our own?

Bishop Will Willimon tells of an alcoholic who visited his church in Greenville a few times, then quit coming. Six months later he saw the man going door to door passing out tracks. "What happened to you?" Will asked.

"I visited your church a few times, and it was nice. Then two Baptist deacons visited me and told me unless I quit drinking and abusing my wife I was going to hell.

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<sup>11</sup> *Forming Ministry Through Bible Study: Reader's Guide to the Gospel of Mark* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1987), 61.

<sup>12</sup> Luke 8:4-15.

<sup>13</sup> U.M.Confession of Faith, Article XII: The Judgment and the Future State, "We believe all men stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation" (*Book of Discipline 2012: 74*)

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**Luke 9:1-17 ..... 11**

I accepted Christ that night and am out sharing my faith now. Preacher, your Methodist church offered me aspirin; what I needed was chemotherapy."

I wince every time I tell that story because it strikes so close to home. Some turn to Christ through the mercy of God, in this case the charismatic ministries of preaching and healing and deliverance. Others are awakened only when some deacon stands at the doorstep and shakes the dust off as a sign of God's judgment. To reject Jesus or the ones he sends is to incur judgment as warning. I say No to the life God offers. This gospel is not some add-on for nice religious people; it's a matter of life and death for every human being. These apostles are the continental divide of the cosmos. Their presence forces a choice, and behind them they leave both blessing and judgment, the fragrance of life and the promise of death.

I can see them now. A dozen disciples walking away and looking back as Jesus waves, "See you at 0:800 Tuesday. I'll be praying for you."

About a mile down the road James says to John, "Can you believe him? What if nobody takes us in? I'm hungry. Did you take notes on what he said? What do we do if someone has cancer or we meet a really big demon? I'll watch; you go first!"

I love the first phrase of verse 6, "And they departed...." Perhaps they walked down the road singing the old hymn, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." I want to live this text, not just preach about it. And Yes, I am scared. "Join the club," says Peter, "we were too."

When they arrived at the first village it happened. The grace that was *with them* connected with the grace that was *there before they arrived*, what we Methodists call *prevenient grace*.<sup>14</sup> Imagine how scary it was the first time they stood in a marketplace, in a synagogue, or with a family and announced that God the king was near enough to be touched.<sup>15</sup> Or the first time a demon looked out at them through someone's tormented eyes. Or the first time they laid on hands and lifted their eyes to God in prayer for healing. They'd seen Jesus do it, but now they had to trust the Father and the Spirit without him present. They'd seen Jesus operate on souls; now

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<sup>14</sup> For an update on the Arminian/Calvinist debate on grace, see Don Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief In Line With Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2013), Chapter 4, "Grace: More Prevenient Than Irresistible," 44-57.

<sup>15</sup> Mk. 1:15, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is *at hand* = near enough to touch."

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the scalpel was in their hand.<sup>16</sup> It was a comfort to know he was praying for them.

I continue to be fascinated by Jesus' diagnosis of the human condition, how he viewed our common plight. The fundamental issues are not political, not economic, but spiritual in the purest sense. His village-to-village mission presumes good Jewish people are alienated from God. Some are so hard-hearted they reject the message and the messengers. Everyone without exception needs a revolution, a turn about: turn to God's approaching kingdom, turn away from all known sin, be freed from the afflictions that mark this fallen world through healing and deliverance, sign up with the Jesus movement. I don't know what this looked like in detail. Some day I plan to ask Peter. Small villages, Aramaic speakers, two strangers wander into town, gather a crowd, announce that the kingdom of God is near, and then spiritual phenomena start happening. Isn't that what it says? Verse 6, "And they departed and went through the villages, *preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.*" Too many to count. That is what revival looks like. Teams scattering to other towns. Men and women confessing their sins under the conviction of God's Spirit. The power of God present for healing and deliverance. Joy in God's grace. People getting free: free from sin, free from Satan's torments, free for God, free for one another. And where revival was resisted, it leapt over one village to the next.

David Livingstone, the great 19th century missionary to Africa, summed it up this way, "God only had one Son, and he made him a missionary."<sup>17</sup> Jesus had twelve cronies, and after a season of apprenticeship he made them missionaries. Which means you are either a missionary or a mission field. Which is it? Are you a mission field, or are you a missionary? "Never pity missionaries," wrote Robert Shannon. "Envy them. They are where the real action is, where life and death, sins and grace, Heaven and Hell converge."<sup>18</sup> D.T. Niles said that the church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning, which means a church that is in-grown, a church that is more concerned about upkeep than outreach, a church that prides itself on being historic and is not reaching out to its neighborhoods is in trouble. We don't want to be a church God leaps over to get to others but one he moves through.

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<sup>16</sup> For an amazing read on a modern method that mimics Jesus, see Kevin Dedmon, *The Ultimate Treasure Hunt: A Guide to Supernatural Evangelism through Supernatural Encounters* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> David Wells, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 219.

<sup>18</sup> Idem.

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**Luke 9:1-17 ..... 13**

It is one thing for the message of Christ to be presented and then rejected. Jesus made provision for that. What he made no provision for was for the disciples to stay in a *holy huddle*, hearing endless sermons and never putting it into practice by taking God-sized risks. People are lost. People are alienated from God and one another, locked up behind walls of unforgiveness and bitterness. Some are sick in body, others in mind or emotions. Some are wounded with evil. God has an answer. It is Jesus Christ through his Spirit-filled extensions, men and women who share his mission in the world. That's us, Main Street United Methodist Church, a mission agency at the corner of Cambridge and Main in the center of Greenwood. We are to stick up for the Lord Jesus and be his ambassadors right here and wherever he sends us. "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross...." It's in our hymn book! We sing the songs that came out of old revivals so piously but without much thought, and when God sends us a fresh visitation, we will write our own new hymns and songs to celebrate what God is doing in the present.

The interlude featuring Herod's conversation with himself in verses 7 through 9 serves two purposes. It's a notice from an outside observer that something *otherworldly* is going on. Herod was an evil man; he admits to the murder of John the Baptist, but he shared with Jesus a world view that included God and the supernatural. He knew kingdom stuff when he heard about it and wondered who'd been raised in spirit. The second purpose is to note that spiritual advance is never without opposition. Remember that government power conspired with religious leaders to do Jesus in. Those who extend Christ's ministry will face opposition.

I once had a friend in Charleston; his name was Blaise Wagenbrenner. Blaise was a submariner in WW II up through the 1960's. And when he went to Groton, Connecticut to the memorial, he knew the names and numbers of all the boats that went down. I had a joke about Blaise. For any question you ask him, the answer is *World War II*. It bugged me at first. Then I understood that he risked his life and how the intensity of those days under water marked him forever. His war stories were real. So were those of the Twelve: verse 10, "On their return the apostles told him what *they had done*." Jesus listened and cheered. There were high fives and some misty eyes. I look for the day when so much is happening around here between Sundays that I don't get to the sermon for all the testimonies that will be given when we gather for worship. I will continue to preach every week, but only until someone comes to me with a story that's better than what I have to offer. And when you do, the microphone's yours. I'm preaching the Scriptures and waiting for God to move. Jesus was proud of his friends. Things were moving along on schedule. They were learning by doing, and his time was growing shorter by the day.

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Two things I note about Jesus. First his uncommon good sense and care for his friends. The intensity of mission needed to be followed by a rest. Adrenalin takes a toll: verse 10, “And he took them and withdrew apart to a city called Bethsaida.” And secondly his willingness to be available. This time the twelve were observers: verse 11, “When the crowds learned it, they followed him; *and he welcomed them* and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.” It was his ministry into which they had been invited. And if the Scripture is to be believed, he wants to share his power and authority with us as well. It could make church exciting again, but only if we welcome the ones he sends!

**WHY HUMAN PLANS ARE NEVER ENOUGH (vv.12-17)**

When reading the Gospels it’s important to notice what’s not said. Between verses 11 and 12 is a passage of time, most of a day in fact. It was a huge crowd, five thousand men plus women and children. Jesus moved among them healing, taking as long as it took, intent on whoever happened to be before him at the time. But it was getting late, and so the disciples came up with a plan to help Jesus out since he was so preoccupied. I laugh when I read such. I then wince because all too many of my prayers are giving the Lord advice about what I think he ought to do at Main Street. Jesus included them in his kingdom works, and apparently they thought it gave them the right to give him advice, “Send the crowd away, to go into the villages and country round about, to lodge and get provisions,” followed by a reason, “for we are here in a lonely place. We have come up with a great solution you can approve. It makes perfect sense. We even have a flow chart to show how it all works. It’s on my I-Phone app. Aren’t we just the best, Lord?”

It was then Jesus set them back on their heels, “*You yourselves* give them something to eat.” Remember, these twelve men have just returned from an experience where they were stripped of every normal human support and forced into discovering that God was indeed faithful to do the impossible with the aid of the invisible. “*You feed them,*” said Jesus. He wasn’t kidding. “*You listen to God. You hear what he wants to do. You find a supernatural answer.*” He meant it, “*You feed them.*” But they started making excuses about so little food and so many people.

Churches do that. Needs are always bigger than resources. If all we have are our puny ideas and meager resources, not much will happen. So one more time Jesus invites them to trust him more than their plans. “Make them sit down in companies, about fifty each.” Verse 15, “And they did so, and made all of them sit down.” One minute the Twelve are spiritual hotshots telling war stories of their exploits and in the

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next scene go back to ushering and crowd control. Spiritual dependence must be renewed each day in each new challenge. We face the world with *empty hands*.

I used to get mad but now I laugh. Some skeptics have tried to explain away the miraculous nature of the feeding by advancing the idea that once Jesus lifted up his borrowed lunch of five loaves and two fish, it broke the spirit of greed so everyone then pulled out secret supplies from under their cloaks and made a big covered dish so everyone could eat.<sup>19</sup> That's silly. This is a creative miracle, a nature miracle, God working inside events to bring about a novel end.<sup>20</sup> With us a little is never enough; with Jesus a little is always a-plenty. We want routines and predictable results, a method we can control and work. Jesus trusts his Father anew in every situation; it was never technique with him, always a relationship.

The issue is, Are we willing to obey Jesus, even when we don't understand? First Jesus strips them of staff and bag and bread and money and bedroll; now he strips them of something more difficult, which is trusting their own logical, sensible plans. It is a sacrifice of limited rationality for a higher spiritual intellect- *his*. I hate to appear incompetent. That is not your problem but mine, and it means that the question I keep hearing when I pray is this, "Phil, are you willing to appear foolish for me? Would you rather me leave you within the small circle of your own expertise, or would you rather me draw you out into the larger circle of my own?"

"Well, Lord, if you put it that way..."

"It's how it is, one minute a co-worker, the next a goober. Can you handle it?"

I don't often mention the tense of Greek verbs, but this one is important. Verse 16 rehearses four customary actions before a Jewish meal. Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave. The final verb *gave* looks like a simple past tense in English indicating completed action. It's not. It is a Greek imperfect which indicates continued action begun in the past. Jesus took, blessed, broke and *kept giving them* to the disciples to

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<sup>19</sup> For a review of the scholarly options see Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 833-834.

<sup>20</sup> For a review of the philosophical, theological, biblical and pastoral issues associated with the gospel miracle tradition, see Graham Twelfthtree, *Jesus The Miracle Worker* (Downer's Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999). The author does a good job of poking philosophical holes in David Hume's classic arguments against the possibility of miracles. He references Richard Swinburne's eclectic definition of a miracle as "An event of an extraordinary kind, brought about by a god, and of religious significance" (27).

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set before the crowd.<sup>21</sup> Luke understand the miracle of multiplication to have happened *in the hands of Jesus*. The significance of this is that we have nothing to distribute he does not first give us. We depend on his generosity. If he stops giving, we stop distributing. A church that learns this will first ask, “Lord, what are you doing that we can get in on?” before it asks, “What can we do for you out of habit or tradition?” We can only plan *after* we have prayed and discerned what he’s giving at the moment. If he’s giving teaching, we teach; if conversion, we evangelize; if deliverance, we liberate; if healing, we pray; if wisdom, we counsel; if refreshment from on high, we laugh and bless; if mercy, then extraordinary kindness. “What are you doing here, Lord?” is the best question of all. And it takes a team to discern it.

Can you see them stretching out like blobs in the late-afternoon shadows? They didn’t just nibble. This was not a snack but an all-you-can-eat-calorie-coma-for-free! Verse 17: “And all ate *and were satisfied*.” I see each of the twelve holding a basket, knowing what a privilege it is to serve God’s people with the resources he supplies and to find your own heart and belly full in the process. Jesus looks at them and nods, and they know afresh that he is enough. The bond between them is growing. They are learning leadership *Jesus style*, which mean if it’s a risk like going out on mission, you go first; if a privilege like eating, you go last. They didn’t eat till everyone was fed, and neither did Jesus. Together they waited on others.

Did you notice how exceedingly social these case studies are? Being a team. Being immersed in the Trinitarian reality. Jesus sending them to announce his Father’s nearness in the energies of the Holy Spirit. Going to strangers. Sleeping in their homes. Nothing here about privatized, individualized *me-and-Jesus* religion. It is divine compassion in and for the sake of community. It’s what the kingdom looks like, and it will always be messy and awkward, never neat and tidy.

### CONCLUSION

My simple conclusion is this. After today for anyone to say “We’ve never done it that way before” or “We could never do that” means you haven’t been paying attention. To make this faith safe and risk-free and highly predictable is to kill it. “O God our Father, come and show us the way to walk with Jesus again. We need your presence more than we need any program or great idea. Thy kingdom come, and with it all the mess and wonder your friends first experienced.”

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<sup>21</sup> C. Marvin Pate, *Luke* (Chicago, ILL: Moody, 1995), 205.

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