



Luke 10:1-24

“Disciples Get In On The Excitement”

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(1st Sunday After Epiphany)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

A' LUKE 10:1-24
"DISCIPLES GET IN ON THE EXCITEMENT"

//Mk. 6:7-13, Mt. 9:37-38, 10:7-16

1) vv.1-2 Seventy (two) Appointed And Sent Out: Prayer For Laborers. Twelve // 9:1-6

24:47, Gen. 10:2-31 (MT: 70, LXX: 72), Universal Mission: Table Of Nations

1 After this the **Lord** appointed **seventy (two)** *others*, and sent them *before his face*, Acts 1:8, SENDING
 Sending two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. Again As Preparation For Visitation

Pairs: 7:18-19, Dt. 17:16, 19:15, Acts 13:2, 15:27, 39-40; 17:14, 19:22

2. And he said to them, PRAYER

Vision "'The harvest is plentiful,/
 Prayer pray therefore the **Lord** of the harvest but the laborers are few;' Proverb, Reverse Of Agriculture
 to send out laborers into his harvest. Pray For Workers, Acts 13:1-3

No Jewish Precedent, Sent On His Authority

2) vv.3-4 Three Instructions For The Mission: Danger And Dependence. Num. 11:16-17

Jesus Initiates A Massive Kingdom Offensive, Gives Away His Ministry!

3 a Go your way; Took The Risk! Go Into Danger Without Resources! Travel Light!

Sobriety b behold, I send you out 'as lambs in the midst of wolves.' Proverb, Ezek. 22:27, 2 Kgs. 4:29, Packs

4 c Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road. //9:3, 3 Forbidden Items, 1 Practice

Vulnerability No Sandals = Sign Of Poverty, Empty of Stuff / Full of God

3) vv.5-7 Peace (Salvation) Announced And Received As A Sign.

//Jesus, 4:18-30

5 a Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' Acts 10:36, Receptive, *Shalom*

6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; Spiritual Affinity

but if not, it shall return to you. God Has Friends Everywhere

Arrival/ Etiquette/ Ministry

7 b1 And remain in the same house, 3 Peace, 3 House

Stability 2 eating and drinking what they provide, Break Social Barriers, Horrify A Pharisee

2' 'for the laborer deserves his wages'; Proverb, 1 Tim. 5:18, Basis For Compensation

Simplicity 1' do not go from house to house. Not Peddlers Of God's Word, Not Trading Up

4) vv.8-9 The Kingdom Of God Is Near: Blessing. Living Extensions

Hospitality/ Healing/ Preach Kingdom = Jesus' Ministry

8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, Sneak Preview, High Receptivity

Kingdom Work eat what is set before you; Re: Jewish Food Laws, Ritual Purity, Hospitality: Identify

heal the sick in it 9:1-2, 6, 11, Human Restoration, Kingdom Deed

9 and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 11:20, Kingdom Word

Enter/Reception/Deed/Kingdom

4') vv.10-12 The Kingdom Of God Is Near: Cursing.

10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, High Resistance

Judgment go into its streets and say, Collective Guilt Of A Village

11 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; 9:5, Symbol

nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' As Judgment

Retribution Is God's Alone

12 I tell you, Solemn Intro, Legend For Wickedness, Is. 1:9-10, Gen. 13:3, 19:1--29

it shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town. Judgment

Israel Had Greater Responsibility

3') vv.13-15 Woes Announced On Those Who Did Not Turn Prophetic Woe

Mt. 10:15, 11:24, What Would Jesus Say Over Our Town?

13 a "Woe to you, Chora'zin! 9:10 Feed 5000, Towns Of Andrew, Peter, Philip (Jn. 1:44, 12:21)

Woe to you, Beth-sa'ida! Retrospective Summary Of Galilee Ministry

To Reject Jesus And His Movement Is Dangerous, Ultimate Sin

b for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, Zech. 9:3, Gentile

they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. Is. 23, Exek. 26-28

14 b' But it shall be more tolerable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

Miracles Are Catalysts, Not Guarantees, Is. 14:11, 13-15

15 a' And you, Caper'na-um, will you be exalted to heaven? 4:23, 31-41, 7:1, Peter's Home, Jesus' Base

You shall be brought down to Hades. 16:23, Fiery Torment

Devastated By Roman General Vespasian

2') v.16 Three Instructions For Mission: The Agents And Their Senders.

Authority
16 a "He who hears you hears me, **Legal Agents: Chain Of Benefit And Accountability**
b and he who rejects you rejects me, **Jesus Comes Through His Followers! Agents/Jesus/Sender = Father**
c and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." **// 20:9-17**
To Reject Jesus = Reject God
Those Who Reject Jesus Kingship Are Cut Off From God's People

1') vv.17-24 Seventy (two) Return: Jesus' Prayer And Blessing.

a) vv.17-20 Rejoicing Not In Spirit Power But In Divine Relationship.

De-briefing **35/36 Pairs Of Missioners, Heady Experience**
17 1a The **seventy (two)** returned with joy, saying, **Cosmic Battle, 9:10, RETURN**
b "**Lord**, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" **Submit To His Name! Their Association With Jesus**
Their Hand-To-Hand Combat Is Part Of Larger Cosmic Conflict
18 2 And he said to them, **Vision Of Displacement: Kingdom Of God Moves In, Satan's Kingdom Moves Out**
Skirmish "I saw (observed) Satan fall like lightning from heaven. **Seer, De-throned, Satan's Power Broken In Mission**
11:15 Power From Beelzebul Is Wrong, Is. 14:2-15
19 2' Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, **9:1, Rom. 16:20, Ps. 91:23, Pests**
Authority and over all the power of the enemy; **Retrospect, 1:1-2**
and nothing shall hurt you. **Acts 28:3-5, Travel Without Sandals!**
Correction **Power In Ministry & Ones Personal Relationship With God**
20 1'b' Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you;
a' but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." **Mt. 7:22, 1 Cor. 9:27, Citizens List, Personal Salvation Primary**
Rejoice Continuously! 3 Intro. Statements: vv.17, 21, 23

b) v.21 Divine Revelation To Jesus Followers = Babes, + Jesus' Prayer. Q // Mt. 11:25-27

Privilege **Non-Lukan Vocabulary, Trinitarian Moment**
21 In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, **1:47 (Mary), 3:22, 4:1, 18, PRAYER**
1 "I thank thee, **Father**, **Lord** of heaven and earth, **// 1QH7:26-27**
2 that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding **No Snob Appeal**
Kingdom Participation Not Dependent On Intellectual Resources
2' and revealed them to babes; **Ps. 111, 1 Cor. 1:21, Disciples As Infants! Dependence**
1'' yea, **Father**, for such was thy gracious will. **Exclusive Claim For Salvation**
vs. 2 Esdras 12:35-38, Secrets Only For The Wise

b') v.22 Divine Revelation Between Father And The Son As Primary + Jesus' Prophecy.

Christology **Core Metaphor Of The Trinity Is Filial**
22 1 All things have been delivered to me by my Father; **Complete Trust**
2 and no one knows who the Son is **Son**
except the Father, **Father**
2' or who the Father is **Father** **Chain Of Divine Revelation**
except the Son **Son**
1' and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." **// Jn. 14:6, Complete Freedom**
Intimacy And Relationship Matter

a') vv.23-24 Blessing + Reason. "For".

Privilege **Woe + Blessing // Sermon On The Plain**
23 1a Then turning to the disciples he said privately, **Hear**
b "Blessed are the eyes which see what you see!" **See Power Of God's Kingdom**
24 2 b' For I tell you **See/Hear, 8:10-11, 18**
that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, **See Magnitude Of Blessing**
and did not see it,
a' and to hear what you hear, **Hear Now Is The Time Of Fulfillment**
and did not hear it."

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 10:1-24

The sending and return of the seventy (two) is a thought unit with an 8:2 concentric structure of eight parts and a double center (1-2-3-4 // 4'-3'-2'-1'). The acceptance or rejection of the *kingdom of God* (4. vv.8-9 // 4' vv.10-12) is the core. The next outside layer (3. vv.5-7 // 3' vv.13-15) contrasts the blessing of *Peace be to this house* with the warning of *Woe to you* to *Chorazin* and other unrepentant villages that received miracles. The next set of frames has three instructions for the mission (2. vv.3-4) in parallel to the three agents of mission (2' v.16): the of missioners, Jesus who sent them, the Father who sent the Son. At the beginning and end (1. vv.1-2 // 1' vv.17-24) are two uses of *Lord* (vv.1, 2 // vv.17b, 21b) and references to the sending and return of the *seventy (two)* (v.1 // v.17a) that act as inclusions. The closing sub-section (1' vv.17-24) is long enough to have its own internal structure (1-2-2'-1'). It opens with rejoicing (a. vv.17-20) and closes with a blessing (a' vv.23-24), with the prayer (b. v.21) and prophecy (b' v.22) of Jesus at the center. The Father and the Son are in deep and rich partnership in the work of divine revelation. That the Holy Spirit is also mentioned (v.21a) make this a functionally Trinitarian revelation.

_____The sending and return of the twelve (9:1-11) is a preview of the sending and return of a larger body of *other* disciples on mission in Samaria. The seventy (two) are sent in pairs to prepare for Jesus coming, the missiological intent being that what they offer in preview, Jesus validates in person; they are his authorized ambassadors. In that day an abundant harvest always had more than enough day laborers, but this is a spiritual harvest and the reverse is true; since there are not enough workers, those who go must also pray for God to raise up more hands. They have seen Jesus minister; now they are to serve in his name with one another. They are to *go* knowing they are as defenseless as *lambs amidst wolves* unless God protects them. They are not allowed to provide for themselves but identify with the poor (i.e no sandals) and must stay focused and not distracted along the way. That they will find divine appointments in receptive villages is the intent of the greeting, "Peace be to this house." If they are not received, the blessing of peace will bounce back to them. But, having been welcomed into a home, they are to receive simple fare and not trade up to better accommodations. It's not about comfort or status; it's about a new world come near. While it means little to us, the phrase *eat what is set before you* would be difficult for kosher Jews in unclean Samaritan homes, but such is the dislocation of missions. The command to *heal the sick* (v.8c) is stated matter of factly because when the kingdom is near, life is restored. Only then does the interpretive teaching follow, "The kingdom of God has come near you." Deed and Word go together.

_____The flip side of the blessing is the rejection of the kingdom and its ambassadors, which means not only the rejection of the Jesus who sent them (v.16a) but of the Father who sent him (v.16b). The presence of the rule of God cuts both ways; in vv.10-12 we see hear a warning of future judgment and in vv.13-15 the extension of that warning to all towns that did not turn to God after the presence of mighty works. The villages of several disciples (i.e. Bethsaida, Capernaum) are included. With opportunity rejected goes accountability enacted. The joyful return of the emissaries and Jesus' teaching is recounted in 1' vv.17-24. Jesus shares in their joy of seeing people liberated, then adds that in a vision he has seen Satan dethroned wherever they went, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." He then re-centers their identity not in spiritual victories but in a secure relationship with God, "that your names are written in heaven."

In b. v.21 and b' v.22 are two remarkable paragraphs, first a prayer of Jesus to the Father in the Spirit, and secondly Jesus' prophetic statement of his role as the Father's sole revealer. Divine revelation is to the unlikelies, *the babes*, and it is from the One who relates to God the Father with the trust and loyalty of an only Son. For the disciples to hear and see what they now do is something the greats of the past only longed for. In Jesus and his friends the promises of God are offered to Jew and Samaritan.

DISCIPLES GET IN ON THE EXCITEMENT

“Behold, I send you out ‘as lambs among wolves.’”

Not, as they say out West, an encouraging word.

On Saturday November 5th, 2011, U.T. freshman Derrick Brodus was lying on the couch at his fraternity house waiting for the Volunteers game to start at 7:00pm. Less than an hour before kickoff, Derrick answered his cell. It was Coach Dooley telling him a police escort was on the way to pick him up immediately.

"I thought it was a dream," Derrick said.

Just minutes before the call, Tennessee kicker Chip Rhome pulled a muscle during warm-ups. Starting kicker Michael Parry was already out, injured in Thursday's practice, so the Volunteers were out of kickers. Derrick, a freshman, had tried out as a place-kicker, but never made the team. But on that Saturday he was suddenly the Vols' only option. Minutes after Derrick hung up, the police escort arrived to rush him to the stadium. The team's trainer stretched him in the locker room while he put on pads and a jersey that didn't even have his name on the back.

Coach Dooley later told the press, "I said, 'Get an APB out on Brodus. Just get him here. Give him a Breathalyzer.' It's a good thing he wasn't intoxicated."

Imagine the adrenaline. Hear the announcer, "Fans, you won't believe who this kid is. An hour ago he was in his frat house with a bag of chips; now he's the Volunteers only kicker. This should be interesting." When the game ended he'd kicked three extra points and a 21-yard field goal in Tennessee's 24-0 win. In the locker room after the game, the last-chance kicker was a statewide hero. The team cheered as Coach Dooley gave Derrick the game ball.¹ What a great day for football!

Now while sports analogies are overused in sermons, the truth is you never know when the call might come, when you go from casual observer to front-line

¹ Edited, Graham Watson, "Tennessee grabs last-second kicker off his frat house couch," Yahoo Sports (11-8-11).

participant. What a day for Derrick Brodus, the kicker with no name on his jersey.

So it was for seventy other no-names, or perhaps seventy-two depending on which manuscript you follow,² who'd been following Jesus as disciples, as learners, as apprentices in the new reality he was putting on display.³ His goal was to take his stuff and put it on display *through them* and then ultimately *through us* as his ongoing ambassadors in every generation. One day they got the call. Time to stop training and enter the conflict. No more blanks; the fire is now live.

It was not enough for Jesus alone to *do the kingdom stuff* because then people would forever make the excuse- as they do today, "Well, that was him, and he was sinless, and he was the Son, and he was anointed, and he was special and one of a kind, and we- after all- are none of those things." That is nothing but a clever way to avoid the full implications of this faith. We believe and trust Jesus not just for forgiveness and a ticket to heaven but in order to actually follow him now and get in on the action. And when we see him repeatedly sending out his friends to do what he did, it raises a question, Why not us as well?

There's an idea out there in pop-Christian world, and it is a false one, that you can have the benefits that come from Jesus without actually becoming his follower. It's as if Jesus has two titles, Savior and Lord, and you pick the first and treat the last as optional, in effect saying, "I want your rescue from sin and hell, Jesus, but not for you to be my boss and teacher. I want you to do something for me, but I don't want to follow you and learn your ways because it's just too inconvenient." Dallas Willard labels this person as the *Vampire Christian*; their thinking goes like this:

"I'd like a little of your blood, please. But I don't care to be your student or to have your character. In fact, won't you just excuse me while I get on with my life, and I'll see you in heaven."⁴

² David Garland, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2011), 425 on the MT and LXX of the table of nations in Genesis 10:2-31. Seventy and seventy-two are exchangeable in the Jewish tradition as a symbol for the Gentile nations.

³ On the recovery of discipleship in the modern church, see Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2006).

⁴ Ibid. 14. Also Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), "The Creation of a Non-Discipleship Christianity," 41 ff.

But how can we trust him unless we believe he was right about everything? About all the details of our lives and how they work best. And why would you want to spend eternity in the presence of someone whose company you avoided now? Jesus has a bigger life for you than you'd ever shape for yourself. He want to use you!

Faith means following; trust leads to training, and in the process we find him working not only *in us* for our benefit but *through us* for others, often in surprising ways that involve divine revelation and the powerful gifts of the Spirit, and here I know just enough to be dangerous. In my history are five or six blow-your-socks-off events that make me hunger for more because of the sheer joy and wonder of them. Many pastors have had such encounters but are hesitant to share them in public.

The question I most often ask in prayer is, Why doesn't the good stuff happen more often? What am I missing? Why is it so hit and miss? There you are doing life by the numbers when another world breaks through, and it marks you forever. If, as Jesus repeatedly said, *the kingdom of God has come near*, why is so little happening? Could it be that we've claimed his benefits but not become his students?

Note that in the passage before us Jesus gives it all away. The energies of the kingdom are no longer proprietary; the patent is released; the drugs go generic; the kingdom is activated and released to the *little-ole-me's whose names are never recorded*. Every one of the seventy is an amateur, none of them made the insider team of *the twelve*, and yet everyone gets to play with the powers of the kingdom, but only in two's so they help each other with the teamwork and the temptations that accompany the gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit.⁵

Everyone get to play, but no one goes alone because it's spiritually dangerous work, like *sheep among wolves* was Jesus' bloody analogy, to be followed later by the equally vivid image of walking across a wilderness populated with *scorpions and serpents*, the intent of both word pictures being *that there are powers out there as vicious as a pack of wolves and as deadly as poisonous pests in camouflage* that wants to resist your efforts and harm you personally, and we know who they are.⁶ When you are trying to follow Jesus and something pushes back, it means you're

⁵ See John Wimber, *Everyone Get To Play* (Boise, ID: Ampelon, 2008).

⁶ That animal imagery was used for spiritual struggle in second temple Judaism is clear from such passages as Sirach 21:2, "Flee from sin as from a snake; for if you approach sin, it will bite you. It's teeth are lion's teeth, and can destroy human lives."

getting close to the mark. Something is protecting its influence and doesn't want you around, so rejoice!

That's how Jesus described the mission of his expanding kingdom pressing in against demonic strongholds, some of which were so entrenched that entire villages officially resisted their approach, an eventuality Jesus saw and prepared them for. Not just the twelve this time- the apostles whose names we know,⁷ but seventy-two no-names. First the apostles in an initial wave of expansion in Galilee, then the rest in a huge wave into the forbidden zone of Samaria. First clergy, then laity; first the officers, then the army en masse. First the *you-know-who's*, then *the little-ole-me's*. Everyone get to play. Everyone gets to enter the struggle. Everyone learns.

Jesus gave them a share in his life and then a piece of his kingdom work, and guess what? It worked, and they loved it. "The seventy-two returned with joy," writes Luke. They'd first watched him be a kingdom agent; now he watches them work under his mentorship, and it set them on fire with divine joy. The experience of God using them glued them to Jesus at a new level. Not longer did Jesus take all the shots; he now passed the ball to them and cheered when they dunked one! He went from being the sole superstar to being their player-coach. They were no longer observers but full participants doing what he did *in his name* and with his approval, as verse 1 says, "And this the Lord appointed seventy-two *others* (meaning *other* than the twelve), and sent them before his face, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come." Thirty-six teams of no-names fanning out to just as many no-name villages where they would be either received and bestow the riches of the kingdom or else be rejected and leave behind a solemn warning of future judgment and no present benefits. One village was healed; another just down the road stayed ill. A spiritual map of soft and hard hearts was being drawn.

The kingdom of God thrives on receptivity and bypasses resistance, leaving behind a checkerboard of mixed results because God loves our Yes's and respects our No's. The loving power of God now flowed through them to needy, sinful, misguided, demonically compromised Samaritans who'd been their enemies for years. In Jesus' name they got to love those they formerly despised and were required to eat with them before the kingdom was released. Jesus reminds them to "eat and drink what they provide," and "eat what is set before you." Guests don't determine the menu, and kingdom visitors show good manners, as in the great missionary blessing,

⁷ Luke 9:1-10, 51-56.

“Where you lead me, I will follow, and what you feed me I will swallow!”

You see, it’s hard to give and receive hospitality in people’s modest homes without having to show manners and be kind to one another. Breaking bread softens everyone up, and when the relationship are moving in the right direction it’s a lot easier to pray for people and follow the Spirit’s leads. Hostility and hatred and mistrust and suspicion make the trust of faith extra difficult. Eating together confirms our common, food-dependent humanity. None are self-sufficient; all need bread; all need the bread of life. And when you pray with and for others, something amazing happens; you start to see them through the eyes of love rather than suspicion and distrust. The best way to change our attitude towards a jerk in your life is to pray for them, that God pour out his choicest blessings on them. Works every time. The gifts of the Holy Spirit and the energies of the kingdom of God flow along the power lines of love. It’s why Paul put 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter, in the middle of two chapters on the power of the spiritual gifts, including healing and prophecy.

It was a great day for the kingdom in the receptive villages of Samaria. The missionaries gave the devil a black eye and made lots of new friends of old enemies. The fame and name of Jesus was increased since all they did was in reference to him, as they later reported, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us *in your name*.” The seventy-two were healed of old bigotries, and the receptive villages got a dose of new life for whatever ailed them. Kingdom zones were created across the region. When Jesus later arrived in those same villages, since the plan was that they precede him, can you imagine the welcome? First the armies of liberation, then the King himself. In the 1980's my brother Chris had the privilege of taking a column of U.S. M-1 tanks through some German villages that hadn’t seen Allied troops since 1945. To his amazement the older people came out to cheer and throw flowers on the tanks. Forty years after liberation, they were still grateful. He cried when he told me the story.

We don’t have the details of the arrival stories, but they are clearly implied by the way Jesus set up the mission: first them, then him; first the ambassadors, then the Executive. The only place Jesus offered post-mission correction was to remind them that their secure relationship with God, “that your names are recorded in the citizenship rolls of heaven,” was more enduring and thus more important than any of the spiritual victories Jesus viewed at a distance, “I observed Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”⁸ Like a general observing the battlefield from a mountain top, Jesus

⁸ On recent research, see Darrell L. Bock, *Who Is Jesus?* (New York, NY: Howard, 2012), Chapter 6, “Jesus and Exorcism,” 79-92. That Jewish speculation about the

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was given a glimpse on thirty-six fronts at once of how his faithful, dependent, undefended troops were faring, and it gave him great joy, “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them babes,” and his joy was for two reasons:

- 1) He could only be at one place at a time, and the harvest was too great for one man. The incarnation, God the Son assuming flesh and gender, had clear limits, so he multiplied himself through his students.
- 2) Secondly, that others were now being caught up in the love and life he shared with the Father and the Spirit from eternity; these no-names became his extensions with a view to the church being just such a Spirit-driven community after his resurrection and gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. It gave Jesus both reach and scope. More turf and a longer reach through time. Jesus was not a one-hit wonder; his music continues among his people by his design.

As an analogy to the kingdom invasion of Samaria, think of a bunch of NAACP officers, maybe even Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy, showing up at a Klan rally in the mid 1960's, enduring abuse, then praying for all the red necks and seeing them healed and delivered, then crying and laughing and forgiving one another. That's how radical it was for Jews from Jesus to be sent to Samaritans in a mass mission. And the key was that they arrived defenseless as Jesus prescribed. The initial visuals were important: no wallets, no lunch buckets, just two vagabonds without shoes, their only defense a blessing from Jesus, “Peace and salvation be to his house.” And when someone took a risk and invited them in, then the show started and eventually jumped from one house to another as the blessing spread.

Don't you want to see that kind of thing happen in our day? Isn't it our only hope for the deep changes we need and for which our current methods of social engineering of the left and right seem so colossally ineffective? That's how radical this was wherever the Jewish messengers of Jesus were received by Samaritan villages, and where they were not received nothing changed except everyone came under judgment. Grace ignored is judgment begun. Close your eyes to the sunrise and the day is spent in darkness. Missing God's approach has all kinds of consequences,

Messiah included his overcoming the Evil One can be found in multiple sources, among them *The Testament of Moses* 10:1, “Then his kingdom will appear throughout his whole creation. *Then the devil will have an end.* Yea, sorrow will be led away with him.”

now and later. Personal and social. Political and in terms of cultural integrity because the scope was *whole villages*, not just individuals. What did it mean to the village for all to be well enough to work? Prosperity increased. For energy to be no longer wasted hating Jews? Mental health increased.

It's been a while since the Methodists had a visitation of divine life. We are running low on the energies of grace and its multiple benefits. What if we fasted and prayed together during Lent? What if we sought God instead of just fought for institutional survival? What if we went beyond membership to discipleship and asked Jesus to teach us his stuff again? Not just to admire him but to actually follow him as his day-to-day students?

The experimental reality that went invisibly with them and showed up in the villages through them was the Holy Spirit, what I like to call *God at ground level*, as if the Creator came down the elevator from the penthouse of the universe and walked out into the lobby to set things straight. Jesus called it *the kingdom* or *rule of God*, and in his presence it meant that the power of God's love through the immediacy of God's Spirit was touching and transforming people in all kinds of startling ways: sins forgiven, minds illumined, hearts set on fire, bodies healed, evil presences evacuated, Scripture fulfilled, bread multiplied, repentance enabled, joy released in great cleansing waves, the religious establishment challenged, synagogue liturgies disrupted, the dead raised, hope restored, religion redefined, a mass movement launched. It was as if God's big eraser was at work wiping the board clean and starting over with whoever was next in line. It was Jesus as God's new day and God's new way to reveal a new world just beyond sight. In him we get a glimpse a the new world already on the way. One day in fullness, but now in preview.

And at some point you will come to a decision about whether this stuff happened as reported or not, which I believe it did for two reasons. One is historical in that I've read the books and weighed the arguments of the scholars on both sides.⁹ Even the skeptics agree that the traditions about Jesus' powers are early, many, and reliable. At a minimum they admit Jesus believed he was working miracles in the power of the Spirit, as did those who observed him, friend and enemy alike. None of the early witnesses questioned the power or the effects, the only question being, Did the spiritual power come *from above* or *from below*? Is it God or the devil at work through this odd young man from Nazareth, and people made choices and took sides

⁹ The work of Craig Keener in his two volume *Miracles: The Credibility Of The New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2011) changes the landscape towards credibility rather than skepticism. Our world is not sealed off but porous to divine action.

till some decided he had to go, and soon! Like this Friday!

The second reason I trust the gospel reports is that I and others, now and across church history, have had things happen which are not unlike what we read in the book, or at least close enough to make the stories credible, things like divine speaking, spiritual gifts, unexplained healings and encounters with evil, not to mention observing the immediate and long term changes that go along with conversion as Jesus opens up a whole new world to people. We've seen things happen to us and through us and to others and through others that it takes God to explain, and many of us are quite well educated and trained in your best universities and seminaries. If so, it means our world is structured so as to be user-friendly to God's disturbing presence which may break in upon us at any moment; and if not, then your reduced version of the faith will take a different spin, perhaps as a self-improvement project with Jesus as a great example or as a political movement to make the world just a little bit better on your watch as is now dominant in our shrinking Methodist circles.

Now ethics and the struggle for social justice is important as a fruit of faith, but to be sustained it must be grounded in something more than the latest fashions in do-goodism which are so popular in our politically correct circles. It must be grounded in primary religious experience, in a meeting with the Father and the Spirit through Jesus Christ that wraps us in Trinitarian love and releases in us new desires and new powers so that we remain hungry for God, and currently we are not short on ideas to do good but the face-to-face stuff that glues people to Jesus at a heart level as his disciples.¹⁰

If this stuff happened then, then it can happen now because the structures of the world have not changed; only time has passed, and if you wish you can calculate the number of seconds since Jesus walked among us. And if this is part of what it means to be a student of Jesus, then we need to recover all of it we can, even if it means going outside our circles to learn from others. But if it didn't happen then and so doesn't happen now because of the great continuities, then we have a much reduced portrait of Jesus and a much reduced profile of what it means to be his modern day followers, and frankly I'm not at all interested in the tamed, trimmed-down,

¹⁰ For a both/and approach to power ministry and social justice, see Rich Nathan, Insoo Kim, *Both-And: Living The Christ Centered Life In An Either-Or World* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2013), Chapter 3, "What Is Our Concern: Mercy and Justice," 86-112, Chapter 4, "What Is Our Method: Proclamation and Demonstration," 113-138.

secularized, explained-away, gelded, de-supernaturalized version which is so much the legacy of what used to be the mainline churches, now old-line and sidelined and feuding and splitting on whether to become merely a chaplain to the culture or to preserved the treasures of divine revelation and their clear moral obligations.

The Jesus of the gospels is the real Jesus, the one who is alive and asking for our attention today, and after long study and observation, I believe he's pretty good at his job; I just want to get in on more of it, just like the six dozen no-names he sent out one morning on a massive spiritual experiment that worked and then brought them back full of joy with hours of testimonies to unpack in the debriefing sessions that followed. Everyone had a testimony because Jesus let them in on the excitement of who he was and what he was about.

Now not everyone liked their rabbi because they found his personal claims and powerful deeds offensive. His followers had seen it happen over and over- every day in fact, that in his presence the deep truth about people was exposed, not the role they played or the persona they displayed but the deep truth of the heart, whether they were open to the surprises of divine love or not. The result was that they were either drawn towards him or repelled away. In Jesus' presence their spiritual polarity was revealed, sometimes with whole villages as when the home folk of Nazareth tried to kill him¹¹ or when Capernaum and Chorazin and Bethsaida observed his miracles but persisted in their resistance to a change of heart and mind and were duly warned that Sodom would fare better than they would at judgment.

Because Jesus is the only fully approved outlet for knowledge of God, as he himself confessed, "And no one knows who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him," whether we are drawn toward or repelled by him says much about us. His friends watched him up close, heard his best stories over and over, and so fascinating was what was happening in and around him that they left their old lives to be with him. Jesus plus the twelve plus the seventy-two: by my count that's eighty-four plus who knows how many others who didn't get sent out that day because the cut-off for symbolic reasons was seventy-two as a mission to Jewish outsiders.

This was not- to use military terms- a small squad, but more like a full military company which ranges from eighty to two-hundred and fifty. It took a lot to feed and

¹¹ Luke 4:16-30.

house and keep them on the road.¹² It was a big deal for a village to host them for an evening, but oh the benefits of having a personal visitation, because- in ways that goes beyond our comfort zones- to deal with them was to deal with him, and to deal with him was to deal with the One who sent him. The Father and the Spirit backed the Son, and the Son and the Spirit and the Father backed those Jesus sent out. Not to trade up for better accommodations but for the sake of service.

Where Christians go in love and integrity, there goes Jesus, and with him the Father who sent him and the Spirit in whom he rejoiced in ecstasy that the work was now extended through these babes in the kingdom, these teams of no-names, these average folk who answered the call, "Follow me." So when you see a piece of art with Jesus and the twelve out on a stroll, remember there were many more no-named men and women who followed and in an act of great courage went out two-by-two to see if it worked through them as well as through him and the twelve. And it did.

Have you seen the 2011 film *We Bought a Zoo*, based on the true story of a Brit named Benjamin Mee? In 2006 Mee and family purchased a 30-acre neglected California zoo in the hills. In the book, Mee says that his new neighbors included "five Siberian tigers, three African lions, nine wolves, three big brown European bears, four Asian short-clawed otters, two flamingos, a Brazilian tapir called Ronnie, some large boa constrictors, and a tarantula." Sound like a local church to me!

The zoo was dangerously rundown; challenges included a rat infestation and finding enough money to feed the critters. On day four the jaguar escaped, endangering the neighbors. Eventually Mee and family restored the zoo to a place of beauty that provided healing for themselves and hope for the community. Mee admitted, "There were times I thought, What have I done?"

So why buy and remodel the zoo? In the film, Mee (played by Matt Damon), says, "Sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it."¹³

Have you noticed, as I have, the difference between being an observer and being a participant? How easy to observe a work of art and how hard to paint something yourself. How easy to read a book and yet how hard to write one yourself. How easy to scream at the quarterback who just threw an interception and how hard

¹² See Luke 8:1-3 for one of the sources of income.

¹³ PreachingToday search under Luke 10:1-24.

to suit up and take a hit now that you are a little older and much softer. How easy to critique the sermon as too long or too deep or too demanding and never wonder would it be like to prepare and deliver one yourself that was true to Scripture and the faith? How easy to make fun of those who pray for the sick and inwardly tormented when you have neither the faith or courage to try it yourself. How easy to be a spectator in our day, a couch potato, a critic, a pundit, and how challenging to risk twenty seconds of insane courage to rescue a zoo or give your testimony or move out of your comfort zone in love or to embark on some risky mission with a friend.

The following quote is from Theodore Roosevelt’s speech *The Man In The Arena*, first given in Paris at the Sorbonne in 1910, and when I read it, particularly aloud, it does something to me. It stirs my desire to resist the lure of the spectator and to be more an actor in the drama of my own life. It’s perhaps as close as we have to a creed from Roosevelt, and I’m sure its raw American brashness ruffled the French, but maybe they remembered it seven years later when the dough boys showed up to fill the trenches and face the mustard gas. I have only one life to be a man, only one life to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. And while his language is all masculine, the intent is for all of us. Roosevelt spoke:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is not effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the triumphs of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”¹⁴

What is the miracle of the passage before us? Not the healings and deliverances that happened once they arrived. Not the judgments they invoked or the friends they made among the village elders of the Samaritans. The true miracle is not even recorded but assumed and inferred, hidden between the lines. It was that thirty-six pairs of no-names took a first step from where they were towards a harvest for

¹⁴ Theodore Roosevelt’s speech *The Man in the Arena*, delivered at the Sorbonne in Paris, April 23, 1910, www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trsorbonnespeech.

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which there would never be enough workers. No cold and timid souls that day.

That they stepped out in faith with their backs to Jesus and their faces toward the villages of Samaria is the miracle from which all else flowed. They entered his mission as participants instead of observers, and they did it by faith and trust and obedience and hope. One step, then another and another till Jesus was out of sight and all they had was their buddy beside them and the strength of the promises of Jesus.

That's the twenty seconds of insane courage and embarrassing bravery Benjamin Mee recalled. And when they found they could do the impossible with the aid of the invisible, they knew the supreme treasure, which is to find yourself caught up in the work of Jesus.

What if we could all get in on this? What if there's more to this faith than we've discovered? Wouldn't it be worth finding out? And if there wasn't more, then we could all return to what we have now feeling very comfortable and safe. God help us! God save us from a comfortable faith. God deliver us into the holy energies and dangerous surprises of your kingdom.
