



Lutheran Church
SOUTH AUSTRALIA / NORTHERN TERRITORY

Synod Sermon
17 August 2008



Sharing the Faith

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Luke 10:1-9, 17-20

Jesus and his disciples are on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus knows that suffering and death await him. He is on the way to the cross. As they continue on this journey Jesus is teaching his followers to be disciples. Like a wandering Rabbi he shapes his students by letting them listen and watch what he does. Jesus' school of discipleship involves more than head knowledge, he is also showing them how to minister to others in his name. So the day comes when Jesus calls seventy of his followers and sends them out to prepare the way in the places where he intends to go. They have watched him and learned; now it is time for them to do it themselves and learn even more." In effect he tells them something like this:

"I have a job for you: **Share the Faith!** I want you go ahead of me and heal the sick and preach the kingdom, just like I am doing and like the twelve did. Oh, and by the way leave your wallet at home, don't take a bag or extra clothes, don't stop to chat to your mates, and don't go shopping around for the best place to stay. Just get out there and **share the faith** by healing the sick and declaring the kingdom of God has come near."

Someone has said that God must live in a tree because he is always pushing me out on a limb, especially when it comes to **sharing the faith**. These are ordinary followers of Jesus, not the religious professionals. They are just ordinary disciples. People like most of us, in fact. We are not told of their reaction to this assignment, but we can imagine how we might react. I can almost hear you say, "I could never do that! I am powerless, I don't have enough knowledge, and I even lack faith."

These seventy ordinary Christians that Jesus sent out may well have felt the same way. Notice again what Jesus says: They are going out as lambs in the midst of wolves. They are vulnerable to any number of dangers. And they are to go without purse and money or extra clothes. They have been stripped of whatever power and support structures they might have had. They can't use their resources to help them get through. They go into scary territory with empty hands. Jesus is pushing them out of their comfort zone. The seventy disciples could easily have said, "No Lord, send someone else. I am not ready to **share the faith**. I am afraid. I will not go."

You probably know what it feels like when someone tries to push you out of your comfort zone and get you to move into new territory and extend yourself. You get a tight knot in your stomach, clammy hands, dry throat and weak knees. Maybe you have also experienced this when you have sensed that the Lord is sending you out of your comfort zone. You know the opportunity is there. But it is all too much. It is easier to stay at home where it is comfortable and safe and let someone else **share the faith**. But when we decline to go we miss out on discovering what God can do through us when he pushes us out on a limb.

The seventy are sent to bring good news in word and deed. Jesus tells them to "heal the sick and say, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'". They proclaim the kingdom in a world that is sinful and rebellious. God is King and his rule mends rebellious hearts by bringing the forgiveness that Jesus was to win when he died on the cross in our place. The kingdom is near because God is here to forgive. Jesus came into the world to bring the world back to God and the seventy are sent out to be part of this great task. Jesus also sends us out into his world so that others may be forgiven and baptised into this kingdom as the Son of God brings them into a loving relationship with God his Father. We can identify with the seventy because we have also been sent into the world to **share the faith**.

The seventy also bring healing into a world that is broken and in pain. They bring deliverance to a world that is in bondage and addicted to many substances and other powers. We see the pain and hopelessness every day in our time as well. We see people who are caught in Satan's web and who can do nothing to save themselves. Where the disciples of Jesus go the kingdom of God is at work defeating the kingdom of Satan. This begins even now and the victory will be complete when the King returns when there is no more sickness and death and no more bondage and frustration. Then we will be whole as God intends us to be. The kingdom is already near and we begin to receive its blessings. That which happens now is real – we really receive God's gifts and blessings – but it is not complete. Perfection will only come in heaven.

We may well ask how ordinary people can do such extraordinary things? They can't, and we can't. It is Jesus who is at work here, not us. It is all about Jesus, not all about us. Jesus lives in us, by the power of the Holy Spirit and he does his work through us. As the seventy disciples say on their return, "Lord, in your name, even the demons submit to us." They say 'In your name'; not in my name, but in the name of Jesus. It is his name that is at work, because where Jesus' name is, there he is present.

Are we vulnerable and weak? Do we sin and fail? Are we unworthy disciples who are not fully devoted followers of Jesus? Of course we are weak, sinful and unworthy disciples! We have God's treasures in jars of clay, and broken jars at that. We fail every day and even our best actions are tainted with sin, but God still works through us. He still uses us to continue the work of Jesus in the world. He still uses us to **share the faith**. God works mighty things through ordinary people like us.

The seventy return with joy having **shared the faith**. Their hearts are burning within them and they are bursting with joy. "Lord", they say, "In your name even the demons submit to us!" And Jesus agrees, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." The seventy did not see Satan fall from heaven and often we too do not see what God is doing. It is a hidden reality and we don't see the results. Maybe occasionally God pulls back the curtain and gives us a peek. Because we walk by faith and not by sight we believe the promises of God even when it seems Satan is winning. We trust God whose battle this is – we are a people of faith.

It is now crystal clear that the disciples go with Jesus' authority, not their own. Jesus is even protecting them and keeping them safe so that nothing can separate them from the love of God. Knowing that your relationship with God is secure is an even greater joy than seeing God work through you. Or as Jesus says, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." What a joy it is to know the love of God in Jesus Christ so that you – and others – might live with him forever.

So next time you sense that God must live in a tree, because he is pushing you out on a limb and when you feel God is pushing you out of your comfort zone, hear it as a call to **share the faith**, and go, knowing that you are weak, and if it depended on you, you would surely fail, but also knowing that Jesus is lord of Lords and king of Kings and that it depends on Jesus and not on you. Because when you **share the faith** Jesus is **sharing the faith** through you.
Amen.

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