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**Luke 10:1-11**

*After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'*

When our leadership team asked me to preach a candidating message on a scripture text of my choice, my mind went in a few different directions.

First out of curiosity, I went to the Global Church calendar. Today's lectionary text is from the Gospel of John, and is about separating the sheep from the goats (SLIDE)... maybe not ideal when people have told me that leading at UMC is like herding cats.

I thought about some of my favorite Old Testament passages, such as Micah 6:8; "And what does the Lord require of you? Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God" - foundational enough in my life to recently have it permanently tattooed on my arm (SLIDE), but I wanted to make sure I centered today's message in the Gospels - Jesus feels centrally crucial enough for me to make sure I picked a passage from the New Testament.

So, Gospel texts... I thought about Matthew 22 (SLIDE) where Jesus is asked, what is the greatest commandment? If I have to pick a key passage, perhaps I should just pick that foundational one?

But then, nostalgia grabbed me, and I thought back to twelve years ago, the last time I preached a candidating sermon. In July of 2014, I stood up here in this very pulpit (SLIDE) and preached a sermon on Luke 10, the sending out of the 72. On that Sunday I preached hoping that we would find a shared vision for campus ministry. I hoped that together we might imagine a future of being sent out (SLIDE) - not to aggressively shout a message at our community, but to intentionally be present in the world.

I often think about this scripture passage when I think about what I believe about the heart of the Gospel message.

Jesus appointed seventy-two of his followers to prepare the way, and sent them out in pairs, stating, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." They were instructed to travel lightly, rely on hospitality, and focus on offering peace and healing while announcing that the kingdom of God had drawn near. They were to be present with people, and if rejected, to shake the dust from their feet and move on.

As Lily read, in this text, Jesus' first followers didn't go out leading with preaching and proselytizing, instead were sent out prioritizing relationships and being present.

I tried to do just that during my six years as our campus pastor (SLIDE). I saw myself as a connector or bridge builder between the campus, our community, and our congregation. It was meaningful and deeply moving work, and I hope that it sparked something in our local context along the way.

I was reflecting on this moment from 12 years ago with my family, and remembered that my sermon way back then included references to Lego building blocks, and the video game Minecraft (SLIDE) - both described as worlds only limited by the user's imagination. At the time, Anika had just turned 4, Alethia was yet to turn 1, and Jonas had not yet been born. (SLIDE) So of course they wanted to read this old sermon. I pulled it up on my laptop and Alethia remarked, wow, you write the same way as you did way back then. But then she started to scrutinize my content. "Dad, I think you got a few things wrong about Minecraft." Jonas, our resident Minecraft expert, wanted to take a look as well. And before I

knew what was happening, he was adding comments to that old Google doc, pointing out all the Minecraft insights that I had missed.

I started to feel a bit defensive - the point of my Minecraft and Lego references was not to give a sermon highlighting the aspects of those wonderful imaginative spaces, but to remind ourselves that when we consider being sent out in an expansive world, the possibilities are only limited by our own imagination.

What I love most about this passage is the freedom to explore, to imagine, and to join the Holy Spirit in trying new things. (SLIDE)

To me, this sending from Jesus means going without a specific agenda and simply joining the Spirit's already-existing presence in our world. Last Sunday's message from Doug McPherson reminded us to be a bit wary of when the Holy Spirit is overly showy. I will continue to think of Doug's experiences of charismatic showboating and misaligned outlet plugs leading to fake Holy Spirit electric shock. Doug's words reminded us to notice the Spirit in the unexpected wildflower meadow hidden away in the woods.

The church traditions who do a lot of public evangelizing often do this with a clear and aggressive - sometimes showy - agenda. Often fueled by saving souls, or getting more pews filled at the sending church, or maybe earning some kind of heavenly reward. But our passage this morning doesn't seem to come with a clear metric for success. We're left then to consider what it might mean to make disciples in our own context – especially in a world jaded by the way mission and outreach has happened in the past.

I think that's why here at UMC we encourage each other to join the Spirit's movement in our unique contexts. We understand that there isn't one set formula, but that we move with sensitivity and awareness of what is taking place. Some of us might be called to work with housing insecurity (SLIDE). Some of us might be called to be educators or health care professionals (SLIDE). Some of us have a passion for peace in Israel/Palestine, or conflict transformation in central Africa (SLIDE). Some of us show up to proclaim that Black Lives really do Matter, (SLIDE) or to march in the streets in support of our LGBTQ identities. Some of us care about income inequality and some of us care most about the environment. (SLIDE)

Whatever direction, we do so because we feel called. And we move intentionally to be present with those in need. We do so because we believe that God is with us in that work. Whatever the space in which we join God's movement, we are all called in some unique way.

Now discerning how to be sent out comes with many questions. How will we be received by those we connect with when we don't fit the mold of what people expect from a people of faith? What expectations or baggage will we need to leave at home? How will we know what a successful movement looks like? What are the ways that God is *already* at work in our contexts, and how can we join those movements?

It means lots of prayer, making sure that we are listening, and paying attention. But even more important we must be a faith community centered around ongoing conversation and discernment together. I think about our community cafes from back in the day, our Sunday school conversations each week, our ongoing Church Around the Table experiment, even our casual conversations in the foyer, or poolside at Vonda and Doug's backyard. We take our beliefs, we reflect on what we are seeing and experiencing, and then we share that in community with each other. We don't undertake this work alone - we do it with the support and affirmation of our fellow siblings in Christ.

It also means we must be open to having those expectations transformed along the way.

When I began my work as a campus pastor at Penn State I naively assumed that I was being brought in to be an expert resource to the students at Penn State. (SLIDE) I centered my early work on workshop-style teaching, trying to articulate to students what it meant to be a person of faith concerned about peace and social justice. I knew we had this unfortunate reality in which students felt like they had to choose between being a person of faith or caring about justice, and I assumed that it was my job to teach what a "third way" might look like. Of course assuming that young adults would simply show up in spaces to be taught a third way, after spending all day in class was a foolish notion. Instead we had to figure out how to demonstrate that unique third way with a *presence*-based focus (SLIDE) rather than a teaching or preaching focus. Event and activity creation

became less of a focus than walking alongside those who needed support, folks who were already doing, or starting this work, to try and empower them, and join in a more presence-based movement.

An example is this:

Within my first months on campus I met several LGBTQ Christian students who shared that while their Christian identity was welcomed by their peers in the spiritual center, their sexual or gender identity was often not. (SLIDE) Similarly, in the LGBTQ student center, their sexual or gender identity was affirmed while their faith commitment was often not. They were also in need of a third way – a space that acknowledged that they could be fully Christian and LGBTQ in the same space. Together we created Receiving with Thanksgiving, Penn State's first LGBTQ Christian Network. It didn't take much effort - just a willingness to stand up for those who were feeling marginalized, and in doing so, join the Spirit's movement in my community.

That small step of solidarity with those Christian LGBTQ students led to other very powerful moments. My role as a pastor they could trust meant that when one of those students tragically lost their life, I was invited by the family to officiate at the funeral, (SLIDE) with the family acknowledging that I provided a pastoral presence for their child who did not have an affirming church home until that point. Awareness of my willingness to participate in the funeral of an LGBTQ student took me in many unexpected directions including officiating the wedding of a couple in the Altoona area (SLIDE) who couldn't find an affirming clergyperson close by, and then helping to create a gender transition service for a student who wanted to be blessed in this way (SLIDE), the LGBTQ student center began inviting me and other campus pastors to participate in clergy hours for their students (SLIDE), and then a clothing exchange program started in honor of that student who had lost their life.

None of this was part of my agenda when I began my work on campus. I didn't arrive aiming to work with LGBT Christian students or be the gay pastor. It was the unexpected result of going out to be intentionally present.

We see parallels in some of the ways that our congregation has been living beyond our walls. (SLIDE) Those who care about the environment have made

our building more efficient, have created pollinator and vegetable gardens, and used our parking lot as a tree pickup location for Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light, and Plowshare Produce CSA pickup. Our solar array has inspired other faith groups to pursue similar kinds of setups for their buildings, an ongoing ripple effect for a better future.

Those who have been doing the work of refugee resettlement for years, provide a foundation to stand in solidarity with our threatened migrant community. Pastor Kate's work around Israel/Palestine and Christian/Muslim relations has led to an ongoing vigil at the gates, (SLIDE) which in turn has meant ongoing connections with our local Turkish Muslim community, (SLIDE) as well as the new Jewish minyan meeting in our building. Our posture of opening our building during the week for groups in need of space to simply exist has moved from language classes to singing groups, religious gatherings, Rapid Response meetings, Bridge of Hope, Acoustic Brew, (SLIDE) and even Molly's High Intensity Workout Training group.

(SLIDE) What all these things have in common—from the unexpected wedding I officiated, to the interfaith connections sparked by a vigil, to the ripple effect of our solar array—is relationships, and a willingness to be sent out without a specific agenda. All the while paying attention to the Spirit's movement. We are called to step into the world to practice presence, share peace, and offer healing. In doing so we trust that the harvest is plentiful - perhaps not always in the ways we expect.

University Mennonite Church, our success is not measured by a clear metric or a pre-set formula, but by our freedom to explore the world and join the Spirit's movement already at work in the unexpected wildflower meadows of our community. When we let go of our expectations and open ourselves to having them transformed, the possibilities for experiencing the kingdom of God are only limited by our own imaginations.

So let us continue to listen intently, pray deeply, and look for where God is already moving in our neighborhoods, in our broader community, and across the globe. Let us go out intentionally in the world, seeking to be people of God's peace, trying to be fully present with all whom we encounter. As we step forward together, let us carry the peace of Christ to everyone we encounter. And if we

must shake the dust from our feet, know that in moving on and aiming to be present, we will find again where God is at work.

Amen.