

A sermon preached the Congregational Church of Almaden Valley,
United Church of Christ
San Jose, CA
Date: July 4, 2010
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Luke 10:1-11 (Psalm 30)

Another Great Commission

Today is the day that citizens all over the United States are celebrating an idea. Actually, I think we are celebrating two ideas that go hand-in-hand. We are not only celebrating the idea of independence, but also the idea of freedom. While our country is over two hundred years old the ideas of independence and freedom are ancient, in fact, I personally believe they go back to the very moment of creation. Inherent in the very core of our beings is a desire for independence of thought and freedom to live your life making your own decisions and choices. These ideas are worth celebrating and we have the testament of many who have given up their lives for these intangible ideas that independence and freedom are worth a struggle. My faith also tells me that these ideas are instilled by a creative force which knew that love and loyalty and faith are only valuable, only have real meaning and legacy, if they are given freely from one to another.

Jesus, who was born into a society and culture and people whose very home was occupied by an oppressive regime, understood these ideas of independence and freedom and having the ability to choose for ourselves very well. That is a pretty amazing understanding when you live in a society where you can only practice your faith because the ruling secular authority is allowing you to or granting it to you, but at the same time will not hesitate to persecute you if appear to want more independence and freedom.

Jesus sent out seventy people with not even a pack on their back to preach the Good News of God's love for everyone who will accept it. He told them to travel lightly—they didn't a GPS, or iPhone, or fancy car. All they needed was enough love for the stranger they haven't yet met to share with them the Good News that there is a God who loves us so much that we are given a choice about whether or not to believe, to serve, to share, and to obey some simple rules of love, fairness, justice, and mercy. Jesus was asking his students and followers to spread the news that there was not only a God who loved them for just who they were, but there was a community that would love them, too, and welcome them into their family.

Why did Jesus send these people out? Was it to raise more money from them to build a large cathedral dedicated to worshipping him? Jesus never built any structures did he? In fact, just before he sends out the seventy he tells people “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” I think Jesus knew that his real work focused on sharing ideas and faith not just constructing buildings. Jesus was building a body of people who would be offered the choice to love, serve, and care for each other even the midst of hard and uncertain times. The church is not a building, a sanctuary, a narthex, or a fellowship hall—it is the eternal body of people who represent Jesus to the world yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Jesus was working to bring the reign or kingdom of God to as many people as he could and he needed an entire village of people to spread the world and witness to the love of God. The more people who make the choice to serve God and love neighbor the closer we come to that ineffable, intangible place we all know as the kingdom of God.

If a church is not reaching out to share the Good News than it is not serving its purpose. Or if a church only wants to increase its numbers to pay the light bill and the pastor and survive for another decade it is not acting as the eternal body of Christ. The reason to bring more people into the body of Christ is to better to witness to the kingdom of God that has already come near but is in need of fulfillment. We, my friends, have the choice about whether or not to reach out to our neighbors and why we are reaching out to our neighbors.

Later this summer we will be asking every member and friend of this church and every member of our sister church ECA to follow Jesus call to plant seeds and bring in the harvest. We will send people out into the neighborhoods armed only with a simple door hanger which will carry a simple message: please join us “two churches under one roof” who are wanting to live out and spread the good news that we are here to love God and each other and serve the community. We will enjoy some simple and, hopefully delicious, time together on a Saturday morning (Aug. 21st) and then, just like Jesus sent out the seventy we will send people out in pairs of two to distribute door hangers that simply invite people to join us. If you cannot walk then help prepare the fellowship and food for the walkers. If you cannot do that than help prepare the maps. There will be a ministry for everyone. We hope people will feel so good about doing this—about spreading the Good News—that we will do this again several times throughout the year.

Let us not hide our friendship, family, love, and joy under a bushel or simply in the sanctuary. Let's join our lights together and let them shine for God and for each other and for the love of our neighbors. I hope you will join in. We need you to join in. But, it's your choice! Yours is the independence and freedom to join in. Amen.

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