

Theme: Why Take Up the Task of Ministry?

Last week, I got out golfing and I got paired up with another guy about my age. We got to chatting and asked about each other's jobs. Then it came, the question I've sweated for years, probably the single most frequent question I've ever had to answer besides, "What do you want for dinner?" What's the question? "Why did you want to become a pastor?"

I've always felt like people were looking for some amazing flashy answer, and so I never felt like my answer had enough pizzazz. Isn't that just like us? We want it to be something epic and flashy, something that sounds biblical and miraculous, like the Lord Jesus appeared in the sky and knocked me off a donkey and said, "You will be my light to the Gentiles." He may have done that when he changed persecuting Saul into preaching Paul but he didn't do that for me. Sometimes people might ask a little different way, something like, "When did you get your "calling" from God? And it seems as if they're fishing for the moment God spoke through the clouds directly to me to tell me to be a pastor. I can tell you one thing for sure. He never did that.

I can tell you at least one bad reason my 17-year-old self wanted to be a pastor. I thought if I was a full-time minister of the gospel, maybe I'd be less sinful. That didn't pan out. Turns out the more time you spend in the Word, the more you realize how sinful you are inside and out.

I can tell you at least one reason I didn't want to be a pastor. I was one of the 75% of people who thought their worst phobia, even ahead of death, spiders and heights, was public speaking. But as for reasons why I wanted to be a pastor, my answers always seemed to start with "um..." and end with something unenthusiastic, as if I didn't really want to be a pastor. But I do! I love being a pastor. I just could never seem to put it into words.

As I began meditating on this week's text with my golfing partner's question in the back of my mind, I realized I've been overthinking this question for years. The answers are simple, but they are by no means boring. In fact, when you dig a little, these straightforward, commonplace answers to why anybody would want to take up the task of ministry, whether as a pastor, or teacher, or staff minister, are actually full of lightning flashes and pizzazz. The answers are found in the powerful word Jesus lays before us today as he commissions seventy-two followers to take up for a time the task of ministry.

So here's our theme question today. ***Why take up the task of ministry? Reason #1:*** Because Jesus asks for you. The good news of the kingdom of God needs to be proclaimed and Jesus chooses to use people in order to do it!

"The Lord sent them out two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go." (Luke 10:2). He sent them out to prepare the way before him, to announce that the **"kingdom of God was coming near."** And what was the first thing Jesus told the seventy-two he had just sent out? **"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Luke 10:2).**

Do you think Jesus didn't know the Lord of the harvest, so like, the disciples needed to ask in his place? No! Jesus is the Lord of the harvest. He's the one who sends out the workers, and he tells those same workers to ask, to beg, to pray to the Lord of the harvest for more workers. Well, why does he do that? Because there's always more work to do and more workers needed to do this vital work. And while they are doing it, he wants them thinking, and praying, and asking and recruiting more workers as they go along.

At our district convention a few weeks ago, pastors and teachers and lay delegates gathered together to look after the ministry of our district. Perhaps the issue that rose to the top of the priority list is this very one—the workers are few. Pastoral vacancies in our synod are at 150 and teaching vacancies are 150 more.

To the young ones in this room in grade school, high school, college, or to any of you here, ask yourself why you might take up the task of ministry. As you do, realize this. Jesus needs more workers for the harvest than he does shortstops for the brewers or quarterbacks for the packers. Jesus chooses to need workers because God's people need pastors and teachers and servants of the word, and because God's people have prayed to him for those workers. So I've finally found my first simple answer of why I wanted to be a pastor—because Jesus and his people were asking for workers and Jesus says the work is important. Not enough pizzaz? Let me put it another way. The all-powerful, almighty, and holy God asks for help from sinners like you and me. How's that for pizzaz?

Next Jesus sends the seventy-two off into the harvest field. Now you might get the sense from what he says next that he sends them out ill-equipped. First he says, **“Go, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.”** (Luke 10:3) But by warning them, he is actually preparing them and equipping them. Don't think this is going to be easy and everyone is going to welcome you and like you all the time. It's dangerous out there. There are going to be wolves trying to gobble you up!

Then he says not to take anything extra with. **“Do not take a purse or bag or (extra) sandals;”** (10:4). Again, we might think, “What's so bad about packing a few things we might need.” But Jesus is sending them out seemingly empty-handed so that their needs can be met by the people they serve. When someone welcomes you, **“Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages.”** (10:7)

The task is that important that Jesus has arranged for his servants and workers to be provided for and compensated. You won't have to worry about having enough or making enough. The worker trusts the Lord to provide, and God will provide through his people. So Jesus gets rid of one reason someone might not want to serve, that is, that they won't have enough money. In fact, he sends them with an amazing practical promise. While you do this meaningful work, you will have what you need! Now, nobody should ever go into the ministry for the money, but that's a meaningful promise when the stock markets are in the tank and gas is through the roof. You'll have what you need!

After Jesus equips these workers for what to do and how to do it, he gives them an authority like none other. Even though he's sending them like lambs among wolves, he gives them this assurance. **“Whoever listens to you listens to me and whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.”** (Luke 16:16). As you go about this work, you get to stand in the place of Christ, speaking his very words.

With that comes a lightning bolt warning for all of us. If you reject the word God's servant speaks to you when he rebukes your sin or calls you to repent, you reject Christ himself and the Father who sent him. Make no mistake, Christ stands behind his word and his servants as they speak it faithfully. To close your ears is to ignore Christ and it will not come without its terrible consequences, for those who have seen and heard the gospel in word and sacrament at work and reject it. It will be more bearable on the day of Judgement for Sodom, the wicked city

God smited with thunder and brimstone, than for those who tasted what is good and rejected it.

On the other hand, when you hear the voice of Christ's servant and listen and heed his warning, then you also get to hear the sweetest words of comfort as from Christ himself. "I forgive you all your sins." If that was the only reason to take up the task, it would surely be enough—to have the privilege to look God's people in the eyes and assure them of forgiveness in Jesus' name.

So we've seen compelling reasons already. 1) Jesus asks for workers, 2) Jesus equips and assures those workers. Next we see 3) Jesus celebrate the work that they do! We could sum this whole point with one word- **Joy**. "The seventy-two returned *with joy*," and Jesus was also **"full of joy, through the Holy Spirit."** Their mission was successful. Just imagine them returning like giddy school kids retelling the story, "It was so awesome. We went around, and people welcomed us! We spoke the word and healed the sick and then there was this demon and we said, "Get out, demon!" and the demon got out! "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." (Luke 10:17) They got to see God's powerful words at work! Now at the beginning I promised you pizzazz and lighting flash answers for why to take up the task of ministry. Well here's the lightning in Jesus' answer. He told them, [As you were out there doing ministry, **"I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven."** (10:18)

As you called people back from sin, as you corrected a child with law and gospel, Satan lost his grip on them. As you forgave people their sins, Satan's accusations fell flat on their face. You spoke about the coming kingdom of God and Satan was hurled down from his throne as the prince of this world. You spoke my word and the devil and all evil angels could not stand against it. Jesus said, **"I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you."** Luke 10:19) How's that for lightning? As you speak God's word, he uses your words to make Satan fall down and then he crushes his head. All the while, Christ and his church and all his angels sing for joy as each new sinner is welcomed into the kingdom.

1) Jesus asks for workers, 2) he equips them and assures them, 3) he rejoices with them in their work. If all that weren't enough, he adds one more. 4) Don't just rejoice that the demons submit to you, **"but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."** (Luke 10:20) As you hear his word and take it to heart, you will learn just how sinful you are and just how fully you can rely on Christ who has written your name in heaven. He will keep you close to himself and will not fail to give you the reward he has promised.

So dear friends, and especially you young ones considering a life time ahead of you. **Take the task he gives you gladly; Let his work your pleasure be; Answer quickly when He calls you, Here am I, send me, send me. Amen. (Christian Worship 745:4)**

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you" (Romans 16:20).