

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
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Be the Church

Today we hear about the commissioning of the seventy to go out into the world. This story is unique to Luke's gospel. Other Gospels tell about the twelve being sent, but not this additional, larger group.

This story is a great reminder that we, the church, are called as a community to proclaim God's message. Proclamation and mission — these aren't roles for just a select few or only for those who received some sort of special training —but for all of us. This is the mission of the church, something we're all called to do.

Now I know this idea of proclamation and mission can feel like a very non-Episcopalian-kind-of-thing to do...it may remind you of people coming in pairs to knock on your doors at home to share their faith, which is not our tradition.

But what is our understanding of mission and how do we live out our mission in the world today? Those of you who were here a couple of weeks ago, may remember that when I commissioned our youth team for our trip to Honduras, I charged us all to go out and be the church, proclaiming the Good News in word and deed.

Be the church. That's what our youth team tried to live into in Honduras.

Twenty-five of us went to support LAMB Institute from 3 different churches - Holy Spirit, St. David's, and St. Aiden's, along with a couple of friends from other faith traditions — a great mix of rookies as well as more experienced missionaries — and together we experienced a full and emotion-packed week.

Our work involved three projects at the Children's home: building a prayer wall; digging holes for planting trees, and doing some painting at the children's cottages. And although on most days these projects did take much of our time, the work itself, in many ways, was the least important part of what we did. What was important was opening our eyes and hearts to seeing God's hand in the world and discovering that mission work isn't simply about "doing" for others, but instead, is about relationships. It's about being open to listening to God's voice, about having our hearts broken open to perceive God's work in the world, while sharing God's love with one another.

What made all this possible was dedicating time to prayer. Our daily routine was intentionally soaked with prayer. We began with morning devotions — hearing God's word and a reflection on its meaning — and lightly holding onto a few questions each day, to help us look at our day's activities through a different lens. We'd take the time to pray before our meals and often prayed during our projects, both silently and together as a team, particularly if a task was challenging or when something happened that touched our hearts. We took the time to lift up these moments to God.

We encouraged one another to take breaks when needed: to drink water, to rest, to think, and to simply be. Each evening, we would gather to examine our day, share meaningful moments, and

recognize those times when God touched our lives and the lives of others. In community, we discerned and shared with one another, when we had seen God's actions in the world.

And there was so much to see . . .

We saw God's hand in the joyful faces of the children, in the love and care they received and freely gave to one another, sharing all that they had.

We discovered the unlimited power of Christ's healing love, as we heard of crippling circumstances some of these children had overcome — the devastation of poverty, neglect, malnutrition, and abuse. These children at LAMB had been saved, and their lives were now filled in hope and joy.

We learned that things done differently are not wrong, but just different; that cultural context is important, and there are many paths to one destination.

We came to understand that we could do things we had never tried before, like building a stone prayer wall, in spite of language barriers and our own minimal skill-levels. We simply needed a servant's heart, a willingness to serve with humility and patience, attentiveness and flexibility, while working together as a team.

We found that often what's most important are the simple things, like being present and available, allowing us to connect with the children and then discover how moving it is to be sought out by those same children, day after day.

We came to understand how much our presence could mean to others, for simply being there was seen as a manifestation of the love of God — for we, the North Americans, actually embodied the caring and concern of the larger community of faith for these children and the importance of their individual lives.

We learned that joy in play is universal and we can connect in powerful ways through soccer, water balloons, and shooting rubber bands to knock over stacks of plastic cups, again and again.

We began to see that having things doesn't mean happiness and that lives can be full without an emphasis on acquiring more and more — that we don't need to be swallowed up by consumerism and greed — for there is so much joy in opening ourselves to community, in serving others, and being open to allowing others to help us, as well.

And we began to sense the beauty of communities that spend more time focusing on caring for one another, rather than themselves. There is both health and new life when we can center on "we" instead of "me."

So how are we called to live out our mission in the world today? How do we proclaim the good news?

Jesus gives us a model for mission, and tells us that the harvest is plentiful, that there's much work for all of us to do.

Sometimes this means we go, like our trip to Honduras. Other times it means we stay, to pray for our community and the world, and work into Christ's call locally.

But whether we go or stay, we live into our mission in the world when we follow Jesus, connecting with people, building relationships, and seeing the world through eyes of compassion, living our lives in hope, and spreading that hope to others.

We live into Christ's mission in the world when we refuse to engage in society's game of insiders and outsiders, instead striving for justice and peace by moving beyond our fears, stepping away from xenophobia and racism, and reaching out to others — the marginalized and the poor, immigrants, refugees, and prisoners — with respect, mercy, and kindness, for all are God's beloved children.

There is such life in grabbing hold of our mission, our call, to be the church. We are strengthened for our work by faith; faith in the power of the Word, faith in the power of Christ's sacrifice for us, that feeds us once again this morning at this table. For through faith and trust in our Living God, we find the courage, within community, to share God's good news of Jesus' healing love, in both word and deed. Together, we can go out into the world together and be the church.