

Sermon on Mission and the 72

Sunday 7 July, Cashmere Presbyterian Church, Silvia Purdie

Bible Readings

Galatians 3: 23-29

Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

When I read this story I can't help but sing to myself

The animals went in two by two, Hurrah! Hurrah!

*The animals went in two by two, the elephant and the kangaroo,
and they all went into the ark for to get out of the rain*

Except of course this is all wrong for this story, because Jesus called his disciples to go out, not to come in. But he did send them out two by two. It was a team effort and a paired-up task. Like those class projects where you have to work with a buddy, for a Science Fair of whatever.

The Good News Bible says 72. Most Bibles use a different source which says 70 – it's not a biggie. I'm going to mostly talk about 70 today, just because it's easier to say than 72. I expect it just got rounded out. Apologies to the couple who get dropped off.

Luke is tantalisingly short on the logistics. How did Jesus get 72 people organised into 36 pairs and sent off to 36 different villages? Did he make a long list? How did people get put into pairs? Maybe some were married couples, some were friends, some maybe got to know each other pretty quick!

Before I get into the story and its implications for us here at Cashmere, a word about gospel authorship, which as you know I do find intriguing. There are clearly two different sources that the Gospel writers received and re-interpreted.

First, Mark tells of Jesus sending out his 12 disciples, in pairs, and the instructions are much the same as here in Luke 10 with the 72 disciples: travel light, go stay with some folks, share yourself with them, tell them about the Kingdom, heal the sick.

Luke copies Mark's material pretty much as is, in the previous chapter – there it is at the start of Luke 9. But obviously Luke had been told about more people being sent out, not just the 12, and there's more material in here, more instructions, more about their experience while on mission.

And Matthew clearly received the same extra material as Luke, but Matthew merges it with the Mark story, keeping it as the sending out of the 12. And Matthew slants it.

Matthew's writing is more negative than Luke's. In Matthew the experience of the disciples is far less positive. Matthew in his chapter 10 writes hard stuff, about persecution and rejection, about conflict even cutting to the heart of family. "Children will rise up against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of My name." (Matthew 10:21-22). Harsh stuff. Obviously Matthew was speaking from personal experience here. Being sent out by Jesus was no walk in the park, for Matthew. Not all fun and games and cups of tea.

Luke is the only gospel writer who records a large group of disciples being carefully and deliberately sent out by Jesus. And Luke's narrative ends with joy! Verse 17: the 70 returned with joy, telling Jesus excitedly about the amazing things that they saw happening as they prayed for people, and Jesus rejoicing with them that their names are written in heaven and promising them that nothing will ever harm you.

Quite a different flavour than Matthew. Interesting.

So why was it important to Luke that a bigger group of disciples were involved in Jesus' mission? Part of the answer is that it mattered to Luke that women were involved in Jesus' mission. Luke more than the other gospel writers picks up stories of women and

emphasises their participation. It seems obvious to me that the 70 Jesus-followers were a mix of women and men. Luke later in Acts, and Paul in his writings, described a pattern that emerged in the early church of married couples being very influential as leaders and missionaries. Luke in chapter 10 does not spell this out, unfortunately, but it makes sense to me that he's laying the foundation here for couples in ministry. And this is very much a feature of the church today, especially in the Salvation Army, and in many of the big pentecostal churches.

It mattered to Luke that ordinary people, women and men, were called and sent, trained up, apprenticed, given experience, given trust, given the authority directly by Jesus himself to act as his agents. This is galvanised in Luke's theology of the Holy Spirit, which is the agent of this at work after the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus, even in people who never met Jesus face to face. The entire book of Acts is a continuation of Luke chapter 10, as the 70 become 700 then 7000 through the action of the Spirit, calling and sending and empowering. The experience of the 70 became the experience of every believer who received the Holy Spirit and participated in the ongoing work of Jesus in healing, calling others to repent and believe, defeating evil in the name of Jesus.

I am particularly moved by Luke's emphasis on peace. (It's there in the other gospels as well.) Jesus described peace as a process, as almost a tangible thing which could be given or returned.

Say 'peace to this whanau' when you enter as guests. You'll know, said Jesus, whether this peace is received or not. It'll be obvious to you. If the peace is received as a gift, great. Stay. Good things will come from it. If the peace is resisted, then take it back. "It will return to you" said Jesus and get out of there. Don't stay where you're not welcome. Don't give away your peace if it is not treasured. Peace received is peace multiplied – there's plenty for everyone. Peace resisted is peace destroyed; don't let anyone take your peace away from you. I think that's fascinating.

So, friends, what might Luke's story of the 36 couples sent out on mission have for us here in Cashmere at this time?

I think, it's all about partnership. It's all about friendship.

I'm guessing that not many of you feel called to go knocking on the doors of perfect strangers. I've done a bit of that in my time, but most of us run a mile! For us as followers of Jesus, individually and together as a congregation, our calling and our sending is to be good friends to others. Mostly, thankfully, people we already know. But I guarantee that God has new people for you to meet, new homes for you to visit, new contacts and new partnerships that lie ahead for us.

My challenge to you on a personal level is: be bold. Take the initiative. Don't sit at home waiting for other people to contact you. Pick up the phone. Reach across your neighbours fence. Stop and talk to people on the street. Message someone on Facebook that you haven't heard from in a while. Take the initiative. As Jesus put it to the 70, "now go I am sending you". For most of us, most of the time, this means taking the initiative in friendships. Being there for other people. Caring. It's really not hard.

And our challenge on a church level is really just the same. We are taking the initiative in partnerships with others, here in Christchurch, and with others across the city. We are inviting doctors and other health professionals to come for dinner and prayer and input about the importance of faith in their work.

We are working in partnership with other churches to promote care for our environment as a central part of mission in the 21st century.

And one specific partnership for the good of our city is our commitment as a church to be open in times of crisis. You may have heard of CREST. It is the Cashmere Residents Emergency Support Team. It is based here, in our church. You may have heard that last year it stumbled and got embroiled in argument and unpleasantness. Well, I have good news for you. CREST is now functioning really well, with a whole new lease of life, fully endorsed by our Parish Council. Colin Reid is their secretary and David Troughton is your representative. It is now being very ably lead by Alison Murphy from Cashmere Rotary, with top level input from the City Council, Cashmere Primary School and others. I am delighted to report that CREST has got funding to install a generator here onsite, so that when the power goes out – which it certainly will, sooner or later, the Kowhai lounge and kitchen will be lit, with power for making cups of tea and charging laptops.

Being ready to open and welcome people when the worst happens is part of our calling as a church. Our vision is to be a hub for our whole community, here in Cashmere, on good days and on bad days.

This is great news, and all credit to the CREST team for pulling out of the issues of last year and forging stronger partnerships for the good of everyone.

Maybe our song about going into the ark is just a little bit relevant after all. When disaster strikes, we do want to be, like the ark, a safe haven in the storm. We also to stay afloat! Yes!

Jesus sent 70 of his friends out on a mission trip. 70 people, much like us, there's about 70 of us regular members here in Cashmere. Jesus knew them each personally, and they knew him. They were inspired by what Jesus said and wanted to share it with others.

They were energised by how Jesus made a real difference in their lives, and wanted to try it out for themselves – and were amazed when they discovered God's power working as they prayed for other people. They were swept up in the wonder of how Jesus loved, and they wanted other people to taste that love, to know that true peace. So they went out, met some new people, let God lead them in new ways. And Jesus saw heaven open and the powers of evil tumbling down defeated. By the simple actions of friendship by ordinary people like you and me.

Great stuff.

Amen!