

The Acts of Sardis
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A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Luke 10:1-11; 16-20

I just read a lot of verses with a lot of information to process. But this morning, I want to focus on one verse, and one verse only:

After this, the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.

There's a lot in this verse. Let's break it down.

After this.

What's "this?" "This" is the nine previous chapters in Luke's gospel. Jesus appears on the scene. There is teaching and preaching. And healing. And sharing of meals. And conversations. Really good, deep, life-altering conversations. And somehow, somehow, Jesus is able to reveal community, and God's presence to all sorts of people, many of whom don't seem so righteous, in places that don't feel so communal and where God doesn't seem so accessible. Poverty? No matter. Pain? No matter. Brokenness? No matter. Stigmatization? No matter. Unchurched? No matter. Somehow, somehow, when Jesus comes to town, he always finds a way to demonstrate the presence of God, and the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

But today, everything changes.

Jesus appoints seventy others.

Let's start with the number seventy. It's a big number. And it's an important number. After the flood in Genesis, we're told that the children of Noah repopulate the earth. Elaine Heath reminds us that there were seventy descendants who created seventy nations. Luke's telling us that Christ is appointing everyone. The invitation to the kingdom Christ proclaims will not only be offered to every nation, but it will be extended by people of every nation. The ministry of Jesus is global, y'all!!!

And what about that word *appointed*? Up to this point in Luke's gospel, Jesus has been the main actor. He roams from town to town, declaring God's coming kingdom through various acts of ministry. Sure, he's got the disciples, but so far, they've been more like bystanders. By appointing the seventy, Jesus is telling a global community that they are empowered to do the same things he's doing.

Okay. So let's catch up. *After this, the Lord appointed seventy others.* Luke tells us that Jesus has commissioned a global community to do the work that's he's already started.

And he sent them on ahead of him.

Jesus is a force in motion. His ministry is a collection of a thousand tiny moments. Every moment fleeting, but everlasting. Dinner conversations, chance encounters, healing touches – all of these events happen in a flash. Jesus does not stop to document them, or wait for applause from a crowd. He goes in search of the next moment. The recipients of these moments – the newly-enlightened dinner guest, the stranger in the crowd, the wounded-made-whole – each of these recipients is profoundly transformed by a single moment. The kingdom comes so near they could snatch it with their fingers!!! And instantly,

they become swept up into the wave of God's in-breaking realm. And they have a story to tell. Jesus appoints these people. He tells them: "God can work through you in the same way God is working through me. You are equipped. So go, and prepare the people in the towns that I will soon visit."

He sent them in pairs.

Jesus sent these seventy, two-by-two. It's kind of scary to go to a new place and proclaim the Gospel. I speak from experience...even when the folks are as nice as the ones at Sardis, and are chock-full of hospitality. I think Jesus sends the apostles in pairs because he knows that God is best-revealed in community, best-modeled in partnership, best-loved in togetherness. These apostles, like those of any age, would no doubt face ups and downs. But whatever they faced, they would face it together.

To every town and place where He intended to go.

That Jesus. So global. He didn't send the apostles to only some of the places he intended to go. He wasn't running a modern political campaign, choosing only the priorities, the places with the most influence. Luke tells us he went to every town in the region – he hung out on both sides of the lake, with Jewish folks and Samaritans and even Gentiles. And he sent an apostle for every town. Every town on the way to Jerusalem was important. Every potential conversation was worth having. Where does Jesus intend to go? To any place, to every place where God needs to be revealed.

After this, the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.

Remember that Luke's gospel doesn't end with the story of resurrection. It continues into the book of Acts – the Acts of the Apostles. Luke's is a two-part story – the ministry of Jesus, and the church that is born out of his ministry.

And I wonder: what would happen if our little community read Luke's gospel in such a way? And what would happen if we thought of Sardis Baptist Church as the Acts community?

We've danced through Luke this year: we've read about a Centurion's faith; we've experienced the hospitality of an anointing woman; we've admired the courage and calling of Mary and Elizabeth; we've seen grace offered to a prodigal son, or was it two? Have we lived the stories? Have we opened our hearts to a witness that transcends time and space and place? In the hearing of these stories, have we been able grasp a fleeting moment of God's presence, a moment that will sustain us until the next one comes along?

And if we have indeed experienced a gospel moment, a moment that a modern-day Luke might describe, have we given thought to how we'll prepare others to experience such a moment?

The Lord has appointed 70 – about the number of people in Sardis' directory – He's asked them to go on ahead. He intends to be there soon. Do we have the courage to go? And once we get there, do we have the courage to proclaim our own gospel moments?

I think we do, but just in case we don't, I'll close by sharing the theological nugget my grandfather Bob Poerschke spent a lifetime crafting: "Everyone has the potential to be Jesus."

Not like Jesus. Not Jesus for a moment. But, everyone, everyone has the potential to be Jesus.

And I wonder, if my granddaddy got there by reading today's passage? I wonder if he too, heard the Christ say, "You are equipped. And you are ready. And I am sending you on ahead to all the places I intend to go."

Friends, today's lection tells us that the ministry of Jesus is not an unobtainable goal; rather, the ministry of Jesus is an opportunity for all to seek, and in whose participation, all may thrive.

The Lord has appointed us. Should we decide to take courage, and leave this place in pairs, I think there's a good story to tell. I've even got a title: The Acts of Sardis. May it be so! Amen.