

[Luke 10:1-20](#)

The first time I was invited to a meze meal at a Greek restaurant, I was daunted when I saw the menu. Twelve courses? How on earth would I get through all that?

But I need not have worried. For if any of you have had a meze meal, be it Greek or Turkish, you will know that the many courses are small in size. They are more like taster menu size.

And not only that, they arrive thick and fast. So if you try one thing and don't like it, then you don't have to worry, because in a few minutes another dish will be served and you may well like that better.

Today I want to give you a meze sermon. My thoughts on this passage have turned into a series of several short reflections. There won't be twelve, though!

And while I don't want you to sit in judgment on the Word of God, I do encourage you to see as we go along which points nourish you, which themes are relevant and challenging to you, and which ones are of lesser importance to you now.

As you will have realised, the overall subject of the reading is the mission of Jesus.

Firstly, mission is about *partnership*:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. (Verse 1)

No big names here. We don't know the names of the seventy-two. And they don't go alone, they go in partnership.

There is no need to wait for the next big evangelist to come along and hire a huge venue in which to preach if we want to reach out to the community with the love of God.

I have nothing at all against the Billy Grahams of this world. They have had a good effect on millions of people. But they were of their time, when radio and television were exploding. They may no longer be of our time now, either.

And Jesus didn't use this method much. Yes, there were a few times in the Gospels when large crowds gathered to listen to his teaching, but mainly he sends his disciples into the world with his message.

Wherever we go in the world, we have opportunities to speak about Jesus. It's important that we cultivate our relationships in the world for this sake.

I talked about this in a meeting when I was at theological college, and afterwards one of the lecturers came to me and confess, "I don't think I have any friends outside the church." How sad. We will never make an impact on the world if we don't have non-Christian friends.

Where are your non-church friends? Could you and a fellow Christian build a relationship with them and support each other through the challenges of outreach?

Secondly, mission is about *prayer*.

He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. (Verse 2)

I think you know by now that one of the things I am tired and despairing of in the church is the attitude that says we can correct all the things that are wrong in the church or the world with the right techniques or money or publicity. Some have called this 'the technological fallacy', because it forgets the supreme rôle of people.

But above all human beings is Almighty God, and it is to him we must turn if mission is going to make a difference. When we have realised that all the technology and the latest fads and fashions will not rescue us, perhaps we will remember that our primary task is spiritual, and it requires a spiritual approach.

We can pray in a number of ways as part of God's mission. We can pray for those we know and love who do not yet know God's love in Christ. We can pray that our church will be led by the Holy Spirit in what we do to bring God's love to our community. We can pray for the wider church in our nation and around the world: what might she be doing to proclaim God's redeeming love and to demonstrate it?

So who are you praying for? And how are you praying for the church's involvement in mission?

Thirdly, mission is a *priority*.

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

(Verses 3-4)

Look at how Jesus doesn't want the seventy-two to be distracted. Minimal money and possessions. No distracting conversations on the way that will delay you.

Do we really make mission a priority in the church today? What do the agenda of our business meetings tell us about what we consider important? How much time and money are we spending on showing people outside the church the redeeming love of God in Christ? And how much time and money is going on keeping ourselves comfortable?

So now that we are living without COVID restrictions (would that we were also living without COVID itself) what are the activities we can undertake that will provide a bridge to those who need Christ? The more we go on the more we shall have to do things beyond the boundaries of the church building, because this is an alien and unsettling place for members of the unchurched generations.

But we may also be able to remain invitational to some extent. David Voas, Professor of Population Studies at the University of Essex, wrote this in an Anglican document:

Inviting friends to church does not come easily to most English people, which is partly why it is helpful to have non-threatening halfway house events like carol services as a draw. A corollary of the social difficulty of extending invitations is the reluctance to refuse them. Ours is a culture in which asking is a powerful act: it is hard to do but correspondingly hard to decline.ⁱ

Fourthly, mission is about *prevenient grace*.

When you enter a house, first say, "Peace to this house." If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. (Verses 5-7)

The Gospel is a message of many blessings. It includes peace with God and one another. It includes healing of every kind. So if we want to know whether it is worth giving our time to a particular place or person or family, we look for signs of responsiveness to that good news. Is that something these people desire? Is it something they would love to emulate? If so, then it is worth our time.

Why? Because these are signs that God has been at work before we got there. God is now bringing us in to use us in finishing the job.

Last week we talked about moving on when people reject Jesus, and he still allows for that here in what he goes on to say about those who are unwelcoming and the prospect of judgment. But since we majored on that last week, let's concentrate more on the idea that we look for signs that God has already prepared people for his Good News.

It's what John Wesley called 'prevenient grace'. It is grace that comes before anything we do. God always acts first in salvation, we only respond. If someone finds faith it will not be our doing. Instead, God will have been at work in them before we show up and do our part.

So we bless people with peace. We seek healing and all other kinds of blessings for them. If God has been preparing them we will see some evidence and then we should remain and persist. If there is hostility, we move on and warn them of the consequences if they do not repent.

Fifthly and finally, mission is about *peace*.

I've just said that peace is part of the Gospel. In fact, it's pretty central. The wonder of the Gospel is that God gives to us before we give to him. He even gives before we are worthy – if ever we are, anyway.

But for all that, it's easy to get wrapped up with what *we* have done – especially when things are going well, as the seventy-two found out here.

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'

He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' (Verses 17-20)

Just as we proclaim a Gospel that is about God's grace and mercy rather than human merit, so we need to keep within that. It is dangerous to rejoice in anything other than that, says Jesus. If you start rejoicing when everything is going well, you will falsely attribute success to yourself, rather than to God using you. And if you do rejoice when things go well, what will you do when things go wrong? The sense of your value and worth to God will oscillate. You will be unstable.

No, says Jesus, rejoice that your names are written in heaven. This is what anchors us – the grace and mercy of God to us in making us his own, despite our sin. It's what we proclaim as the Gospel. And it's what keeps us on an even keel.

Never lose the joy and wonder that goes with that. It will make people wonder about you – in a good way!

ⁱ *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Programme 2011-2013*, quoted at <https://www.paulbeasleymurray.com/2022/06/30/develop-an-invitational-culture-or-die/>, accessed 1st July 2022.