

People of Peace

Part 1 – Those Who Have Ears to Hear

Luke 10:1-16

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ January 24, 2016 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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¹After 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. ²He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ ¹²I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

¹³“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴But at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades

¹⁶“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” (Luke 10:1-16, NRSV)

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I want to begin with a little exercise this morning. Take a moment to think about three people you know who are not Christians, three people you know who, to this point in life, have not made a commitment to follow Jesus. Who are the first three people who come into your mind? Might be somebody in your family, somebody at work or school, a neighbor, an acquaintance or close friend. If you’re willing, take a moment and write down those three names. Don’t worry, I’m not going to ask you to share them with anybody else.

With those people in mind, let me tell you something you already know. As Christians, part of our calling and responsibility is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people like the ones you just wrote down who do not yet know the extent of the good news God has for them. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into our broken and corrupt world to give his life so that, by the sheer grace of a God who loves us unconditionally, we might be set free from sin and death and experience abundant and eternal life in a world set right again. The joy, hope, peace, purpose, grace and life that you and I have found in Christ is freely available to everybody, including the three people you just wrote down, and this good news is meant to be shared with them by us. Because that is, after all, what you do with good news – you share it!

Smallpox was a horrible virus which, over the course of history, took the lives of millions of people around the world. In the 20th century alone, nearly half a billion people died from this disease. In 1798, however, an English physician and scientist named Edward Jenner began to observe that milkmaids who had previously caught cowpox did not later catch smallpox. It took nearly 200 years, but his astute observation resulted in the development of a vaccine which eventually led to the global eradication of smallpox in 1979. Nobody dies from smallpox anymore.

Imagine how Edward Jenner must have felt when he realized he had come across the cure to this terrible virus. Now imagine if he had kept such news to himself, or shared it only with his family and best friends. It’s unthinkable. Good news like this, especially lifesaving good news, is meant to be shared for the benefit of all. This is even true with good news that isn’t life-saving.

Recently somebody told my wife, who in turn told me, about a little café in Sacramento that makes marvelous soup. At first I was less than ecstatic because soup isn't something I typically order when I'm out to eat. I like my soup homemade. But the reviews were so glowing that a week ago I met a friend at La Bonne Soupe Café downtown and I must tell you that after trying the first spoonful of their French onion soup I immediately understood why there were 50 people crammed into a little café designed to comfortably hold only 20. The good news about the soup had clearly spread and, as good news is supposed to do, continues to spread this morning as I share it with you. Likely, some of you have just now decided where you are going to eat lunch tomorrow.

But soup, after all, is just soup. Even a wonderful cup of it only makes for a great lunch; it won't change your life. And even a lifesaving vaccine is second-rate good news when compared to the good news that we have to share, good news about a God who loves us so much that he has given everything so that the whole world, and us as a part of it, could be set right again forever! And so from the very beginning, Jesus was clear with his followers that part of what it meant to be his disciple was to be willing to go and share with others the good news we have received.

Remember that when Jesus first called the fisherman Peter and Andrew to leave their nets and follow after him, this message was clear in the very first words he spoke to them: **“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”**¹ He then carried that same message through to the very last words he spoke to them: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”**² From the beginning to the end Jesus' message was clear, if you are going to accept the good news I have and then come and follow me, then I am going to ask you share that good news with others in turn.

The problem we run into, however, is that we've seen so many examples of evangelism [i.e. sharing the good news] done so poorly, even destructively, that we're not sure we want any part of it. I participated in the Run to Feed the Hungry with many of you Thanksgiving morning. There in the middle of these 30,000 runners was one man with giant placards handing out pamphlets to as many runners as would take them. I don't remember the exact wording, but his message was essentially, “Believe in Jesus or you're going to hell.” How many of us want to sign up for that good news duty?

Or how about this - every once in a while two people I've never met come knocking on my front door wanting to tell me what I need to believe to be saved. Do we also want to start interrupting complete strangers in their homes to tell them why what they believe is wrong? Who's up for that?

Or think about that guy a lot of us knew in college who found Jesus one semester and then went around the rest of the year shoving him down the throats of everybody else on campus. If that's what evangelism is like it's no wonder most of us decide we'd just as soon keep the good news to ourselves.

What I want us all to see, however, is that Jesus actually left us a pattern for sharing the Gospel with others which quite different. It's gracious, and freeing, and empowered, and natural, and easily reproducible by all of us. It's a pattern Jesus practiced himself and then modeled for his very first disciples who would, in turn, model it for us. In fact, the passage we just read from Luke 10 gives us a wonderful example of this pattern, and this morning I want to walk through this passage as a way to introduce the next several weeks where my hope is we will learn and then adopt Jesus' model of evangelism. My prayer is that eventually we will be a church full of people equipped - even eager! - to share the Gospel with people like the ones who came to your mind earlier.

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So one day Jesus calls seventy of his followers together and sends them out in pairs into the surrounding community. **“The harvest is plentiful,”** he tells them, **“but the workers are few.”** It's a problem we still face today because I believe that there actually are many, many people in our own city who are longing, even searching, for something they sense is missing in their lives. For so many, the promises of the world have eventually rung hollow and left people you and I know hungry for hope, and purpose, and peace, and a security in life that is rooted in something permanent. And

¹ Mark 1:17

² Matthew 28:19-20

while most of these people have heard about Jesus, many of them have never had Jesus presented to them in the way Jesus wants to be presented.

The harvest is still plentiful, but the workers are also still too few. How many of us, I might ask, are out in the harvest sharing the good news with those who have yet to hear it, much less believe it? Are you? Do you go through the day every day looking for opportunities to tell other people about the life that God has in store for them in Christ? Some of you do. I know because you've told me. But many of us don't. And again, I think part of the problem may be that a lot of us potential workers may not yet know Jesus' model of harvesting. Once we do we may find ourselves saying, "Even I could do that!"

Jesus gives us his model here but only after he warns us. In Verse 3 Jesus explains to his disciples, "**Listen, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.**" Jesus is straight with us. Not everybody wants to hear the Gospel. Not everybody wants the Gospel to be heard. January 8th marked the 60th anniversary of Jim Elliot's martyrdom. Jim Elliot, along with four of his fellow missionaries, was brutally murdered in the backcountry of Ecuador by the very people with whom he was trying to share the Gospel. And while most of us may never face such a threat on our life for our efforts to share our faith, we will likely face at least ridicule or rejection for our beliefs and our willingness to share them with others. There are people, some even in our own families, who are as hostile as wolves towards the message of Christ.

So it's true, sharing the good news will be hard at times. Even so, it's still easier than we might think. In fact, in verse 4 Jesus makes clear to his disciples that they won't need much equipment to be evangelists. He tells them to take no purse, no bag, no sandals. Just go out into the community and when you come to a household simply say to those people, "**Peace to this house!**" In other words, extend peace to those you meet. Show them kindness and hospitality, a willingness to share whatever you have with them. Demonstrate an eagerness to serve them without wanting something in return but simply out of a generous spirit. Listen to others about their story, letting them tell you where they have been and what they believe. Then, when it's your turn, humbly share some of your story, where you have been and what you believe. No manipulation, no arguing, no hellfire and brimstone, no mixed motives. Just extend peace to people you meet.

Some of them, Jesus says, will share in your peace. Your peace will rest on them and they will then extend peace to you in return. They will show you kindness and hospitality, reciprocating a willingness to share with you whatever they have. They will likewise be willing to generously serve you. They will gladly tell you their story and then listen attentively to yours. When that happens, stay in that house with those people, accepting their kindness and hospitality by eating and drinking whatever it is they offer you. Don't worry about the next house down the street, or the one after that. Just invest yourselves in the lives of whichever people exchange peace with you. It's as simple as that.

Let me pause and make sure you understand what it is we have to learn here from Jesus. You and I both know and meet a lot of people in this community. Family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, fellow students, teammates, parents of our kids' friends, people who work at businesses we frequent. Some of those people, once you get to know them, will fit Jesus' description here. They will be, you might say, people of peace. Not all of them, but some of them. And once you understand what defines a person of peace you will easily be able to tell whether somebody fits the definition or not.

Again, these are people you meet along the way who return your hospitality; they freely share what they have with you without expecting something in return. You would not be surprised, for instance, if such a person regularly invited you into their home and whenever you were there made you truly feel at home. They are also people who show a willingness to serve you or to make a contribution to something you are doing. Imagine you're trying to raise money for some worthy cause. A person of peace is someone who will gladly donate towards your effort even if he or she isn't nearly as committed to the cause as you might be.

Furthermore, a person of peace, though they themselves may not be a Christian, is open to spiritual things. For example, when you talk with them about something you are involved in at church they don't immediately change the subject or go into attack mode, but they listen with genuine interest to what you are saying. They don't necessarily share your faith but are, nonetheless, receptive to and respectful of your faith.

So take a moment now and reconsider the three names you wrote down earlier. Do any of these people fit this description? Are these people of peace or not? Circle the ones who are. Remember, you can be a person of peace and still not believe in Jesus. It's less about belief and more about receptivity and hospitality and openness.

You see, all through his teaching Jesus made clear that along the way we are going to meet some people who are receptive and others, maybe many others, who are not. Very often when Jesus taught the crowds he would conclude his teaching with these words, **“Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”**³ Jesus said this all the time. And his point was to remind us that some people don't have ears to hear the good news, even when it comes straight from the mouth of Jesus. For whatever reason, some people's hearts have become too hard, or minds have become too clouded, or vision has become too darkened, and so it doesn't matter how clearly or passionately or lovingly you share the Gospel with them, it will not be received. Instead of receptivity you will receive at best indifference, and at worst hostility.⁴

Though I'll say more about this in moment, let me just point out now that Jesus says that when you meet people who are not receptive, who don't have ears to hear, don't waste your time on them. Instead, be on the lookout for people of peace in your life, people with ears to hear. And then when you find them, go and meet them on their turf. Go into their homes. Eat their food. Drink their drink. Become a part of their lives.

You see, too often we get this backwards. Too often in the church we think that sharing the good news is about trying to get people to come to us on our turf. Get people into the pews on a Sunday morning. Build buildings and start programs and plan events that attract people to come to us. But this is never the way Jesus modeled sharing the good news. Always with Jesus, and then later with Paul and the apostles, it was first about going out.

Remember, for instance, that time Jesus was going through Jericho and the local tax collector, a man named Zacchaeus, was so eager to meet Jesus he embarrassed himself by climbing a sycamore tree just to get a glimpse? Zacchaeus, remember, was no pillar of the community. He was a cheat and a traitor, rightly the most hated man in town. And yet, for Jesus he was a person of peace. In his divine wisdom Jesus must have sensed this and so he called to Zacchaeus to come down from the tree. Then do you remember what happened? Jesus went to Zacchaeus' home for dinner and to spend the night, and his willingness to do so changed Zacchaeus' life. Salvation came to that house that evening.⁵

Now, we're not called to invite ourselves over for sleepovers, but we are called to be willing to go and enter into the lives of those who return the peace we first extend to them, to find ways to begin to share life together on their turf. Meals around the same table. Cups of coffee at a favorite café. Time for families to play together. Good fellowship around a BBQ, or at a swimming pool, or on a tennis court, or in a vineyard. Who are the people of peace in your life? What parts of life do you both enjoy that you can begin to enjoy together.

Can you see that this is the evangelism Jesus is modeling for us? Because it is in those shared times together that God will open up opportunities for us to serve and share. **“Cure the sick who are there,”** Jesus tells his disciples, **“and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’** This is what we are to do as well. As you build friendships with people of peace in your life you are to then do whatever you can to serve those people. You may not be able to heal yourself, but you can pray for God to heal. Babysit kids so a long overdue date night can happen. Lend a hand on a house project. Cook a meal when somebody is sick. Do the sorts of things friends and family often do for one another.

And then when God opens up natural opportunities along the way, talk humbly about your faith and the story of how God has worked in your life. Share in your own words the good news about how Jesus has made things different, given you hope, filled you with peace, changed your heart. Make it clear that Jesus is offering the same thing to everybody. And then simply wait to see what God does with that. Trust that he can and will use you to help lead others to a saving faith, in his time and in his way.

Here's some good news. There is no need to stand on the street corner holding signs full of ominous warnings. No need to go door to door and interrupt strangers during dinner. No need to try to shove Jesus down the throats of unwilling acquaintances or friends. Though we'll talk more in coming several weeks about how this can happen, let's not forget that it's really not more complicated than looking for people of peace in our everyday lives, beginning to

³ Mark 4:9, for example

⁴ Jesus offers some great teaching on this in the parable of the sower in Mark 4:1-20.

⁵ See Luke 19:1-10

share life with those people, and then waiting for God to open up opportunities for us to share good news with our deeds and, in time, our words. That's the model Jesus gave to us.

Along the way, yes, we will meet people who do not return the peace we offer, plenty of people. When this happens Jesus' instructions are also clear. Wipe the dust off your feet and go on your way. This is Jesus' reminder to us that we are not ultimately accountable for the response others have to the good news. No amount of coercion on our part can make the heart of another receptive. That is the job of the Holy Spirit alone. And so when you come across people who do not return your peace, don't belabor the issue. Just move on.

This happened to me very recently again with a person I'd known for some time. Though I extended peace to him, and a willingness to share the freedom Christ was offering to him, he refused to return that peace. And to be honest, it was hard. At first I took it personally. Then I doubted my ability to make my points clearly and convincingly. For some time his rejection really ate at me. Until one day God reminded me of this teaching and it became instantly clear to me that he was not a person of peace. At once I felt permission from God to wipe the dust of this person from my shoes and just move on. And though there was sadness, there was also great freedom. I am not his savior. Christ is his Savior. My only job is to present Christ as best I can and leave the results in God's hands praying that someday my friend's heart will soften.

I know that Jesus has some hard words at the end of this passage which we can't ignore. These are stern warnings for those who continue to reject the good news offered them. If you ignore information I give you about La Bonne Soupe Café you may never experience the best bowl of soup in Sacramento. That's your choice. If you face the threat of some fatal disease but stubbornly reject the life-saving vaccine offered you, you run the risk of contracting a disease that will kill you. Again, that's your choice. And if you spend your whole life rejecting Christ and the salvation and life he is freely offering you, you ultimately choose for yourself judgment and condemnation. There is no way around this.

Still, taken as a whole, I don't think Jesus' teaching leads us to take it upon ourselves to speak such words of condemnation and judgment to those who refuse to believe. It seems to me that those are words left to Jesus alone to speak. When people reject the peace we extend, I think we are simply given the freedom from Jesus to walk away and leave things in his hands. And perhaps pray as we go because the person who rejects peace today may by God's grace, many days from now, become the person who eventually receives it.

There's an old Hasidic saying I keep on the wall in my office as a reminder of this, "It is not within our power to place the divine teachings directly in someone else's heart. All that we can do is place them on the surface of the heart so that when the heart breaks they will drop in."

In some ways, Jesus says the same thing at the end of this passage when he reminds us, "**Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.**" Along the way many people will refuse to return the peace you extend to them. When that happens, don't take things so personally. It's never ultimately about you anyway.

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With what I've shared this morning I hope you are as eager as I am to think more deeply together about these things in the weeks to come. There is much more Jesus has to teach us here. But first we must see that we, as followers of Christ, have a great responsibility and calling to take the good news which has been entrusted to us and share it with those in this world who are literally dying to receive it. Once we become willing to receive this calling and responsibility, then God will show us that he has given us a model for sharing good news which is far more gracious, and freeing, and natural, and empowered, and reproducible than most of us have before realized.

The first step, of course, is to begin to pray. In fact, that's what I'd ask you to do this week. As a start, take those three names you wrote down earlier. Add others to the list. Begin to pray for people who do not yet know the love and grace of Christ. Pray, and then watch. Watch for those among that growing list who return the peace you extend to them. Then enter into life together, serving and sharing as God gives the opportunity, and then wait to see what God does next.

Amen.



The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Luke 10:1-16 again. What do you notice here this time through the passage?
2. How is a Christian like a “worker in the harvest”? How is a Christian like “a sheep among wolves”?
3. An evangelist is simply somebody who goes out to share the good news of Jesus with those who have not yet heard or believed it. Would you consider yourself an evangelist?
4. Is Jesus giving us here a model for evangelism for us to follow? If so, how would you describe his model?
5. After hearing this message, how would you define a “person of peace”?
6. Consider somebody who know who is not a Christian but who is a person of peace. How does Jesus’ teaching here guide you in your relationship with that person?
7. What would it look like in our day to “wipe the dust off our feet” after somebody rejected the good news of Christ we had to share?
8. What is one way your understanding of Christian evangelism has changed after this message?



Table to Table Question

Questions for kids and adults to answer together

How can we as a family share the good news about Jesus with people we know who haven't heard this good news?