

Being Sent

A Sermon on Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

Delivered by Rich Holmes on July 7, 2019 at Northminster PC and Calvary PC

In every parent's life, there comes a time to let their child go out into the world. Maybe it is a time when they go off to college, maybe it is when they join the military. Maybe they get married and leave the house, whatever it is, it is a time when as we say they leave the nest, spread their wings and fly. And whenever this happens, in whatever way it happens, it is usually a time that raises questions in the minds of parents and children. As they watch their children pull out of the driveway one last time as a resident of their house, it is almost certain that mom and dad will ask themselves questions like "Have I done everything I can to prepare my child for this? Is he or she ready for this?" And as their son or daughter drives away, they may also ask themselves these same questions, but just from a different point of view, as they say to themselves "Am I ready for this? Have I done everything I can to prepare myself for this?"

Well, since all of us, or at least most of us have been there, either as the child who is transitioning into independence or the parent who is watching the child transition into independence, we should have no trouble understanding our story for today. It is not a story of children going out into the world, but it is a story of spiritual children going out into the world, spiritual birds in the nest spreading their wings to fly.

We have a story of disciples who have been sitting at Jesus' feet for months, maybe even years. Sitting at his feet as they hear his wise teachings, his colorful stories, as they are comforted by his listening, healed by his touch, and as they are given hope by his promise of salvation for the world. But now the Lord says go out into all the surrounding towns and villages and proclaim the good news. Time to fly!

And as Jesus sends them out he has some parting words for them. Surely you remember that. Whether you were the sender or the one sent, when the child becomes an adult and goes out into the world there are always some last words of advice and instruction. Remember what I've taught you. Remember how I told you that it's tough out there. Remember that we always love you and we always believe in you, but now it is your life to live and you must make your own way in the world. It's not that the son or daughter won't come back, it isn't that. As you know if they are merely going off to college they will be back at the end of the semester and maybe even every summer for the next four years, but you also know that as soon as they pull out of the driveway things will be different. They will have crossed over. And it is the same way with our Lord, it is not that the disciples won't be coming back to him, but things will be different when they come back, and so he has some parting words for them. "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. When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them 'The kingdom of God is near.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into the streets and say, 'Even the dust of this town that sticks to our feet, we will wipe off against you.' Why does he say he is sending them out as sheep among wolves? Because when they go out into the world they are in spiritual danger. They go out among temptations and things that can lead them astray. Why not greet anyone on the road? Jesus doesn't want them to be sidetracked or distracted. This is a time of important spiritual work, it

is a time of prayer and focus, not a time to be unfocused and wandering all over the face of the earth. Why shake the dust off your feet for a town that will not welcome the gospel, a town that will not receive the gospel? Well, I am not sure about this one, but I tend to think that is a matter of leaving the past in the past. I think that is a matter of saying I am not going to allow the failures of people in this town become my failures, I am not going to allow their failures haunt me as I make my way over to the next town. I have known dozens of people in my life who have had a bad experience in a certain ministry and they have taken those failures with them into their next ministry. And so the failure never ends. Don't do that, Jesus says, leave that town in that town. Don't even let the dust from that town cling to your feet. Parting words our Lord has, just like you have parting words for your children, and your parents had parting words for you.

My hope for everyone here, indeed my prayer for everyone here is that your experience of church has been what it must have been like for these disciples to sit at Jesus' feet for as long as they did. My prayer for everyone here is that wherever you have been wounded in your life that this is a place where you have found healing. My prayer is that whenever you have felt judged and condemned in life this is a place where you have experienced forgiveness where you needed forgiveness and understanding where you did not need forgiveness. My prayer is that whenever you have experienced life as being dark, and hopeless and depressing as all of us do from time to time, this is a place where you have experienced hope overflowing. And some people may say that it is obvious to them that church is such a place where we receive all these things, and if that is obvious to you, I say "How wonderful!" but it isn't obvious to me. Time and time again, I have heard stories of people as I'm sure you have too who join a church looking for

healing from the wounds they have received in this life or if not healing at least a refuge from the wounds they have received in this life, and they have only found themselves abused by someone they trusted to help them find that healing or to find that refuge. I hope that has never been the case with you, and if you know anyone for whom that has been the case, all I can do is to say that I am truly sorry and pray that that person will one day come to trust that there are far more people in the church who love and care than there are who abuse.

My sincere hope is that the church has always been and will always be a place where you receive the love and support that you need to heal and to allow yourself to be nurtured. But the church does not just exist as a place to love, support and nurture the faithful. There comes a time in everyone's life when they have to spread their wings and fly. Maybe you have known people who have come to church and spent some time learning about God's love and rejoicing when they hear about God's love, and they tell all their friends and church about how wonderful they think the message in that church is and how much hope and healing they experience in this church, and yet going to church and hearing the message is all they do for the next forty years. My friends, that's not the point. The point of whatever healing you experience in here is not just to keep it to ourselves for the rest of our lives, the point is to go out and help bring that healing to the world around us. There comes a time in everyone's faith journey when they need to spread their wings, leave the nest, and fly out into the world. Now, I can't say when that should be for everyone, I suppose it all depends on who you are and what is going on in your life. But for however long it is that you stay in the nest, it should not be forever. There is a world out there that desperately needs God's love. And if we won't show them God's love, who will? There are people who live just blocks from us who are not even old enough to vote

yet who know more about drugs and prostitution than they do about the bible. There are people who are living just blocks from us and perhaps even on our own block who every month have to make a choice of whether they are going to pay their medical bills or buy food or pay the rent and there is simply no way they can do all three. And there are people you can see every day, people who are driving on our roads, and who are saying vile things on the internet and who are shooting up our schools and places of worship who are so filled with hate and anger that I don't think they even know why or where it comes from. They just have to hate somebody for something. This world is in desperate need of God's love, and if not you, then who, if not us, then who?

Lest anyone misunderstand me, I am not saying that the reason God loves us and the reason God heals our afflictions is so that we can go out into the world and do God's work. The reason God loves us is because we are lovable. The reason God loves us is because we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Let me tell you a quick story. I can remember being about thirteen and along with my father I was watching my nephew Maxton who was about two or three at the time, I don't recall. What I do recall though is that Maxton was a holy terror at the time, and just said no to whatever we told him to do. He wouldn't lay down to take a nap. He wouldn't stop going into the cookie jar. He would hit and kick and so finally he kicked me and I said "Maxton you're a bad boy." And my father said, "No, son, don't say that. You can tell him no, or you can say that's a bad thing to do, but don't tell him he's a bad boy."

"Why not?"

"Well, if you tell him, he's a bad boy, he'll grow up to be a bad boy. If you tell him he's a good, one the other hand, he'll grow up to be a good boy." I said, "Ok." But you know, then I

put two and two together and I said, “Wait a minute, dad. You mean all that time when I was little and you told me I was good, I wasn’t really good, you just wanted me to believe I was good.”

“That’s right. You were a holy terror, too.” Dad was admitting to telling me that I was good as a means to an end. But God never ever loves us as a means to an end. God doesn’t love us in order to send us out into the world. God doesn’t love us in order to do anything. God loves us because we are lovable, and we are lovable no matter how unlovable we see ourselves as being. But if you have experienced that kind of unconditional love in here, if this is the kind of place where you have found love, and hope, and healing for whatever you have faced out in the world, then how can you not share that with others in this world. How can you not leave the nest, spread your wings and fly? Ask yourself that.