

## **2 Kings 5:1-14**

<sup>1</sup>Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. <sup>2</sup>Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little maid from the land of Israel, and she waited on Naaman's wife. <sup>3</sup>She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." <sup>4</sup>So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the maiden from the land of Israel." <sup>5</sup>And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten festal garments. <sup>6</sup>And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." <sup>7</sup>And when the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

<sup>8</sup>But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel."

<sup>9</sup>So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the door of Elisha's house. <sup>10</sup>And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." <sup>11</sup>But Naaman was

angry, and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper. <sup>12</sup>Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

<sup>13</sup>But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" <sup>14</sup>So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

## **Psalm 30**

## **Galatians 6:1-16**

<sup>1</sup>Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup>Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup>For if any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup>But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup>For each man will have to bear his own load. <sup>6</sup>Let him who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. <sup>7</sup>Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. <sup>8</sup>For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup>And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. <sup>10</sup>So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. <sup>11</sup>See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. <sup>12</sup>It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup>For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. <sup>14</sup>But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup>For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. <sup>16</sup>Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.

## **Luke 10:1-11, 16-20**

<sup>1</sup>After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. <sup>2</sup>And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup>Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup>Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road. <sup>5</sup>Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' <sup>6</sup>And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. <sup>7</sup>And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house. <sup>8</sup>Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup>heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has

come near to you.’ <sup>10</sup>But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup>‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ <sup>16</sup>“He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” <sup>17</sup>The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” <sup>18</sup>And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup>Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. <sup>20</sup>Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

**Revised Standard Version of the Bible**

## **The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few**

As you know, Carol and I and the Ivies went to the Annual Conference in Denver the weekend before last. One of the big activities at Annual Conference is when the roll call of ministers is read for each of the churches in the conference. It can take a long time to read them all - because after all we are talking about a three state area. There are a couple of hundred churches involved, and many of them have more than one minister. But if you know some of the people, it is interesting to listen and hear who is going where.

And a lot of consideration is given to the ministers that are selected for each congregation. The church interviews the candidate to find out more about them, their ministry style, how things went at their previous church - things like that. At the same time, the prospective minister interviews the church members, trying to find out more about what type of church they are. The minister doesn't want to be saddled with a dysfunctional congregation, or one with major problems.

Anyway, after one of these Annual conference sessions, as the room was emptying out, I looked down and spotted a paper on the floor next to my foot. Someone in one of the neighboring chairs must have dropped it as they walked out. I wouldn't have paid much attention to it, but I could see that it was marked "confidential". After I read it, being a curious sort that I am, I decided to read it to you this morning. But I won't tell you which church it is.

*"We have been unable to find a suitable candidate for this congregation, though we have one promising prospect. We have followed up the recommendations from church members with interviews or calling at least three references. This is a confidential report on the prospective candidates:*

*ADAM: Good man but has had problems with his wife and children. He and his wife have been known to walk around outside without wearing clothes.*

*NOAH: Former pastorate of 120 years with no converts. Prone to unrealistic building projects.*

*ABRAHAM: References reported that he once offered to share his wife with another man.*

*JOSEPH: Big thinker, but brags, believes in dream – interpretation and has a prison record.*

*MOSES: Modest and meek man but a poor communicator. Stutters. Known to blow his stack and act rashly. Left an earlier position under a murder charge.*

*DAVID: The most promising leader of all. Very musical. We discovered he had an affair with his neighbor's wife.*

*SOLOMON: Great preacher but our parsonage wouldn't hold all his wives and children. Has grandiose tastes.*

*ELIJAH: Prone to depression; collapses under pressure.*

*HOSEA: A tender, loving pastor but his wife is a floozy - or worse.*

*DEBORAH: Pushy female.*

*JEREMIAH: Emotionally unstable, alarmist, negative, always lamenting things.*

*ISAIAH: Claims to have seen angels. Has trouble with his language.*

*JONAH: Refused God's call until he was forced to obey when he was swallowed by a fish. He said the fish spit him out on the shore. We hung up.*

*AMOS: Backward and unpolished. Would only fit in a poor rural congregation.*

*JOHN: Says he is a Baptist but doesn't dress like one. Has slept outdoors for months on end, eats a weird diet. Doesn't work well with others – we suggest he become a camp director instead of a pastor.*

*PAUL: Powerful CEO type and fascinating preacher. Short on tact. So long-winded he has been known to preach all night.*

*JESUS: Popular at times, but once his church grew to 5000 he managed to offend them all and his church dwindled to just 12 people. Seldom stays in one place very long. And of course, he's single.*

*JUDAS: His references are solid. A steady plodder and good money manager. Conservative and well-connected with the community and religious leaders. This is the candidate we recommend to the congregation..."*

In our Gospel text from Luke for today, Jesus sends seventy of his followers to spread the good news to every town and place where he intended to go. The number 70 is important because 70 was the number of nations that ancient people believed to exist on earth. Seventy people sent out meant that no tribe or nation on earth was to be excluded from the Gospel. If all people fall short of God's glory as the Bible tells us, then it also says that all people are welcome to receive God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Jesus told the seventy to talk to the people and stay in their homes - which was the norm in those days. We don't see that many door-to-door sales people anymore, do we? Why not? First of all, hardly anybody's home during the day anymore, are they? And at night, with so much to do, and after husband and wife have worked all day, most people don't want to have to deal with strangers knocking at the door.

So, at least in one respect, we live in a different world than the one in which Jesus appointed seventy emissaries and told them to go out two-by-two, into the towns and villages, from house to house, to heal the sick and to tell everyone who would listen that the Kingdom of God is near.

Of course, we all know about some people that go two by two, from door to door. Uh huh, that's who I am talking about.

There is a story going around about two young Mormon missionaries who were going door to door. They knocked on the door of one woman who

was not at all happy to see them.

The woman told them in no uncertain terms that she did not want to hear their message and slammed the door in their faces.

To her surprise, however, the door did not close and, in fact, almost magically bounced back open.

She tried again, really putting her back into it and slammed the door again with the same amazing result--the door bounced back open.

Convinced that one of the young religious zealots was sticking their foot in the door, she reared back to give it a third slam. She felt this would really teach them a lesson. But before she could act, one of them stopped her and politely said, *"Ma'am, before you do that again, you really should move your cat."* Sorry, Carol.

Jesus tells the seventy to go out like lambs in the midst of wolves, to not expect too much but on the other hand not to cheapen the Gospel. If the Good News is welcomed, the disciples were to preach and teach and heal. If the Good News was rejected the disciples were to go elsewhere. As Jesus says, *"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you, rejects me and whoever rejects me, rejects the One who sent me."*

This is the view we generally have of evangelism - people walking house to house, knocking on doors, trying to get people to listen to them and not slam the door in their faces. It really isn't an appealing prospect to many Christians.

Herschel Hobbs tells about Roger Shelton, a pastor from Nashville, Tennessee, who was in Pusan, Korea, on an evangelistic mission. With an interpreter, Shelton visited a man who had creeping paralysis. Both of his legs were paralyzed and the disease threatened his life if no cure could be found. Entering a dimly lighted room, Shelton found the man crouched on the floor. Speaking through the interpreter, he told the stricken man he had come to talk with him about Jesus Christ. The Korean replied, *"I know. I have been waiting for you a long time."* The interpreter responded by saying they had arrived at the appointed time.

The Korean explained. *"That's not what I meant. My people are Buddhist, and I have been a Buddhist. But Buddha gives me no comfort."* Then he pointed to a Korean Bible. He noted that he had read through it twice. *"It tells of a great one. I have waited for someone to come and tell me more about him."* He said that he had believed that if the Bible was true, God would send someone to tell him. Shelton told the man about Jesus. He readily believed. As they were leaving, the man thanked them for coming. Shelton said, however, that the man's final words shook every fiber of his emotional being. *"You almost waited too long,"* he said. (2)

But there are many ways to spread the good news, many places to evangelize, many avenues to healing and teaching and serving. And most of them don't involve knocking on doors. Some of them just call for being there, being with people that are in need.

A young hospital chaplain was serving his internship in a large, teaching hospital. While on call one night, he was summoned to the room of a woman whose baby had been stillborn a few hours earlier. *"We want our baby baptized,"* the young mother said, cradling her lifeless daughter, her husband at her side. *"Her name is Nicole."*

The intern didn't know what to do. He asked the young parents to wait a few minutes and then come to the chapel. Meanwhile, he tried to find a more experienced chaplain to take over. He was unsuccessful. What was he to do? What was he to say? Baptize a stillborn baby? This situation had not been covered in either his theological training or his training in pastoral care. He tried to think what he could say to minister to this young couple in their grief.

But when they arrived at the chapel, the words he had hoped to say did not come. Instead, and almost without realizing what he was doing, he took a tissue, wiped at the tears in the eyes of the parents, then wiped his own tears and touched the tissue to the baby's head and said, *"Nicole, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."*

He said nothing else--the tears were more eloquent than words could have been. (3)

It is reassuring that God is there with us as we do the work that Jesus calls us to. While God does expect us to be faithful, our success is not ours to claim but it is God's own doing. Not everyone will respond positively to the Gospel. Not everyone will believe the Good News. The Scripture passage even redefines what success means to Christians: When the seventy returned they rejoiced in their achievements – *"Even the demons submit to us!"* Jesus upbraided them. More important than authority to tread on snakes and scorpions or even power over demonic forces, is that the disciples' names are written in heaven. The chief goal for Christians is not perfection - but salvation, not success - but faithfulness.

God wants us to witness to people, to reach as many as possible, but God also wants us to rejoice not so much in big numbers and big budgets as in being faithful. God wants faithful followers – people who themselves know and love the Lord. God wants faithful people – who know and love the Lord. God wants us all to witness wherever we find ourselves. As Martin Luther noted,

*"The idea that service to God takes place only in Church and by words done therein..."*

*The whole world could abound with service to the Lord not only in churches but in the home, kitchen, workshop, field."*

Not everyone is called to be an evangelist - or should be - but all Christians are called to be ministers as they live out their Christian faith. We are all ministers who are called to be faithful to our Lord. We can't all be Moses or David or Elijah, Peter or Paul, but we can tell the love of Jesus, how he died to save us all.

Amen.