

July 7, 2019
"Jesus' Mission Tactics"
Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20
Pastor Jonathan

So many things happen to us in this life as a gift. Like having a grandchild. How many are grandparents here today? Keep your hands raised. How many are parents?

Now not everything we experience in this life comes to us as a gift, any instances of abuse we have experienced, any significant moments of suffering and pain, any strange turn of events that cause us deep remorse and sadness. We have a hard time. I have a hard time acknowledging these as gifts. And yet, in Scripture, there are more than a few moments when those who have suffered, do give praise to God. Take Joseph's famously saying to his brothers: "What you intended for evil, God has used for good." (Gen. 50:20) This is Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery, was falsely accused by his employer's wife, was jailed for that false accusation...this is a man who has seen God work in his life, but not an easy life. And of course, we could talk about Job. He had friends who tried to correct him and a wife that asked him to curse God so the suffering would be over; I believe she was trying to help. His book is a long book of suffering, but don't forget to read the end of the book.

And then we come to Jesus, a man well acquainted with suffering and torture. This year, we once again walked through that pain on Good Friday, and we made it to Easter once again. Jesus knows our pain. He knows what you are going through in this season of your life, your losses, your challenges, your temptations, everything about you. He still loves you. He still wants you to know Him better. Do you know that you are His mission tactic, His way to minister to the world? More on this later, stay tuned.

Remember Naaman? He was a Gentile/foreign military man. He had a health problem, a bad one called leprosy, or now called Hansen's disease. It was bad and is bad because it is noticeable, and attacks the skin and extremities, rendering parts of the body impervious to pain. Which you might think is a blessing, but if you can't feel pain, then you can feel infection and this is where extremities can fall off as the disease continues. It's social stigma in some ways is worse than it is, although apparently the germ that causes it is not infectious or as infectious as once thought, that caused leper colonies to arise all over the world. 16 million people still have this disease today, with the most in India. One thing you know, when you contract leprosy. You need help. Where do you turn? In ancient times,

people regularly turned to the prophet or a spiritual leader for help. But which one and where?

This is where a small servant girl comes into the story of 2 Kings 5. She is the missionary. She points Naaman's wife to "one of the prophets in Samaria" who turns out to be Elisha. The little girl is the hero in this story. Don't miss her part.

And I believe it is you and I that point people in the right direction in their relationship with God through Jesus. Maybe you don't see people come to know the Lord immediately or directly, but you can point them to a church or a pastor or elder. And that pointing then culminates in a healing or salvation. That's all we are: pointers to Jesus. The Holy Spirit does the rest. So if you haven't seen many people accept the Lord through your testimony, through your story, don't be discouraged. Keep sharing what you have learned from God and be honest, transparent, vulnerable and the Lord will do the rest. Tell them what God has done for you. Your continuing homework is to know what that is, clearly, precisely, with as much creativity and passion as you have. Doesn't matter how old or young you are. Just share your story of how Jesus transformed your life.

There's a lot more to the story in 2 Kings 5. There is some political maneuvering, state to state, king to king, and then Elisha's self-presentation, informed by the Lord himself. Then there is the pride of General Naaman. "Why should I go wash in an ugly river Jordan, when we have nicer waters at home, near Damascus?" (v. 11-12)

He finally takes the advice of his servants, and he is healed. Here is another place where we have a mission, given to us by God. Where are you serving someone else? Perhaps you are cleaning bathrooms, or helping with children or grandchildren, or just being kind to your neighbor? These are places where you might be able to affirm the Word of God to them, as was spoken through the prophet Elisha. He told the General to wash seven times in the Jordan. Seven is the heavenly number, just the right amount.

Maybe you have relationships where you can simply affirm what the Bible says in that relationship. That's your mission, just like the servants of Naaman. The little girl's name earlier, and these servants' names are not even recorded in Scripture, but they are mission workers, they are the ones helping the main characters get to know God and God's power. You and I can do the same, no matter how you evaluate your strength of faith and your ability to speak to others about

spiritual things, you can use your story in God's employ and help others know God's power and love.

Naaman is healed, and knows God's power, and acknowledges the God of Israel as the one and only God. So a foreigner and Gentile meets God through these little ones, through people like you and me. And remember back in Luke 4 when we talked about Jesus' first sermons in his home congregation? He used Naaman there as an example of God's grace beyond the Jewish people (Luke 4:27) and they didn't like it. Remember?

Jesus uses us in his mission. Look at chapter 10. Did you ever know that Jesus had more than twelve disciples? Not the crowds, but more personally commissioned mission workers beyond the 12: did you know this? What do you think about it? God has more than the ones named in Scripture in His mission. You are one of these. Don't forget this. Sometimes we think that some of us are on the field like a football or baseball game, and the rest of us are in the stands. But there is only one field and we all are on it, no matter what shape we are in. And there are great forces against us, but God knows He can use us just as we are, broken, in process, needy, however we are.

Dr. Luke tells us in chapter ten that Jesus sends out thirty-six couples, individuals going two by two ahead of him, before his ministry would go there. It's a good strategy. People hear about Jesus before they see Him and His power.

But Jesus says it will be hard, like lambs among wolves, so travel light. Travel smart. Use your street smarts. But note that door to door sales is not what Jesus is asking for (Lk. 10:7), and besides the non-Christian religions of Jehovah's Witness and Mormons have taken those markets. You just go town to town and city to city and accept someone's hospitality. That's it. If you are welcomed, great, use that as your base of operations. Heal the sick and tell people the good news about Jesus, "the kingdom of God is near you." Jesus is the kingdom of God. His message and person is our message.

And if people reject you or your master Jesus, just click your heels together to get the dirt off of them and move on. God will take care of the judging, you don't have to, even if you feel those things. Leave the judging to God. We need to leave the judging to God.

Now we know that the 72 people came back giving glory to God. Do you remember why they praised with joy? Because the demons and demonic powers submitted to them in Jesus' name. But remember Jesus' response to this? Although Jesus has given us such power, and we will not be harmed, nevertheless rejoice more that, [what?] your names

are written in heaven, in the book of life. So we do face spiritual warfare. We must pray and be ready to trust God in strange areas of our lives as well as daily ones. But when you praise Him, remember to praise Him for his choosing you and loving you. Thank Him for keeping you as safe as you are, trusting Him anew today.

And then do you remember (I'm testing your memory today), what Jesus rejoices in, and by doing so, invites us to rejoice with Him? (10:21) He rejoices in a surprising thing. He thanks His Father that this kingdom stuff, His whole mission, has been hidden from "the wise and learned" and revealed to little children.

Now I consider myself well educated and I know this and that. Is Jesus speaking against me? No, He is informing us all that it is not a heavy religious, biblical, arts or science education that gets you into the kingdom. I don't believe that Jesus is anti-education or learning, but he is setting the priority straight on the number one part of the kingdom, the Gospel, his work. He sets us straight in the following way: relational knowing, not the academic knowing, not the scientific knowing, not even the emotional or social knowing, but relationship with Him is the core of the faith.

Just like a little child looks up into your eyes, and offers a hug or some conversation, so we are to look up into Jesus' eyes and offer ourselves to Him. It is as simple as that. Have you done that today? Offer yourself to Him right now. That is what Jesus is saying is the Father's pleasure, when we offer ourselves to Him, just like a little child.

And beyond that you need to know that God chose you before you chose Him. He saves you. You don't save yourself. (v.22) And beyond even this is the following: You and I are God's mission strategy, His tactics. He doesn't need billboards and marketing, as I saw many in Texas, but He does need you and me. He wants us to tell others of our relationship with Him. How we have gone away from our sins, and to Him. How we have chosen His path, more than our own. How He has transformed us or changed us positively? These are the key questions.

Did you know that you were God's mission strategy to help people know Jesus? It's not the pastor alone, or the elders alone, we make mistakes and sin like everyone else. You know this about us. It is all of our duty to represent the living God as His ambassadors, showing as many as possible the way to Heaven's Embassy, the person of Jesus Christ.

We've got the red plates on our cars, aren't those the embassy ones? We can represent our foreign government, our Kingdom

of Light and Life to all the rest.

Jesus' mission was always to be carried out by you and me. Does that surprise you? He has no others here. Actually, He has thousands and millions of others, but none that have exactly the same territory that you live in, here in Orleans and beyond. There is no plan B. Jesus uses us and we succeed or fail. Simple as that. Now He is incredibly creative, lest we think He can't do anything without us, in our pride. He can. He does. But we are a vital part of what He is doing here and now. Say "yes" to his mission here anew. Say "yes" to Him anew. Right now.

Let us pray.