

Albany Presbyterian Church  
July 6<sup>th</sup> 2025

Today, the gospel of Luke tells us about those who followed Jesus; we rarely hear about the fact that there were others besides the twelve whom Jesus called earlier. It is interesting how some translations number them as 70, while others number them as 72. There are those numbers in the Bible that are significant, such as the 72 whom Moses chose as elders for Israel in the book of Numbers 11. Some talk about Jesus being buried for three days, 72 hours.

They were paired up and sent with a specific instruction. They were sent ahead of Jesus to the villages. “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

For the Gospel of Luke, it was important to highlight the 72 who were sent out. Luke emphasizes the significance of Jesus' ministry work, which continues into the book of Acts, ensuring we see the ongoing mission of bringing healing to the nations and proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth — the mission of the church and our calling.

Two weeks ago, during my break, I was in Alexandra, Central Otago, and on Sunday, I visited a church built in 1863. St. Enoch. They have since made some refurbishments, most recently replacing the pews with chairs and installing heat pumps to warm the church. However, many of these churches, specifically the church buildings, were decommissioned after the decision was made to disestablish the congregation. Therefore, the building no longer serves its purpose.

This makes us wonder... so what is the purpose of the church?

The first purpose is worship; the Church is a place, a time, or a meeting where worshipers gather to worship God. In Jesus' time, there were temples in Jerusalem and synagogues in each town, where hymns were sung, and the Torah and the prophets were read and preached on each Sabbath day. That is true for the Jews, but for others, like the woman at the well, the story in John 4 reminds us that the place of worship was significant to people, even in contentious issues. And Jesus speaks of worshiping in the Spirit, not limited by time or space. Many places in the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments talk about how we are the worshipper, that we are to worship God, with our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

The second is to equip and edify the believers. Jesus taught extensively on the scriptures, including the Kingdom of God and God's salvation, as well as faith, not

limited by time or space. Often, he was in the synagogue, the local church, he was on the beach, in the mountains, or in the fields, sharing meals and breaking bread in people's houses, wherever he was invited. Paul's letters to the churches in the Bible, as well as to Timothy, Ephesians, Hebrews, and many others, discuss the importance of equipping and edifying believers through studying the Word, participating in fellowship, and engaging in acts of charity and good works. And the third purpose of the church may be what we are given in the gospel story today: to go and "heal the sick" and to tell them, whoever you meet, "the kingdom of God is near you." This is the church facing outward. Jesus gave very specific instructions to go and stay in the same place, eat, and drink what you were given, bless them if they receive you, leave them if they reject you, leave them with no reservation, even the dust that sticks to our feet. In any case, tell them about the Kingdom of God that is near.

This is what Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) expressed in her poem called "*Christ Has No Body*," in which she said... "Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
compassion on this world, Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world. Christ has no body now  
but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he  
looks compassion to this world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

How do we become the hands and feet of Jesus, the Son of God? I am sure the 72 felt the same. This is not as easy to do as it sounds. As Jesus said, Go, I send you out 'like lambs among wolves.' Jesus understands how vulnerable this makes us.

Even worse... Jesus said, "Do not take a purse, bag, or sandals, and do not greet anyone on the road, which means do not delay being held up on the way." They were to carry nothing, not even their basic needs, or plans, nor find a place to grow what they needed, nor cultivate a support network around them. Instead, they are to rely solely on God and trust that Jesus will provide for them and receive whatever they are given.

Yet, Jesus gives an explicit instruction.

Verse 4. When you enter a house, first say, "Peace to this house." If a person 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 provide. God will provide. Trust in Jesus. Have faith.

Secondly, enter a town and stay with them. If they welcome you, heal the sick, and proclaim the Kingdom of God. Do not move around from house to house. If they don't, leave with no hesitation, declare to them, 'even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you,' and declare that the Kingdom of God is

near you. In verse 16, “he who listens to you listens to me, he who rejects you rejects me, but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

On the way to Alexandra, you pass through a town called Lawrence. Here, Gabriel Read, a young man from Australia in 1861, was looking for gold with a pick, shovel, and a disk. As we know, in the 1860s, many like him from all over the world, including those from the British Isles, the United States, Europe, and even China, came in search of gold. They were the seekers who ventured into an untamed land of desolate mountains, swift rivers, and unforgiving climate. This was the beginning of the gold rush in New Zealand.

The 72 disciples came back rejoicing, having found more than kilos of gold, a great experience of seeing the spirit submit to their command, and a sense of great pride. Jesus clearly is full of joy; he said, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’ I have given authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. And rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” No greater joy it gives Jesus than seeing, “our names written in heaven.” And so, in verse 22, Jesus was filled with joy through the Holy Spirit, praise God... “Praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”

Jon Kurt, in his article on Grace and Truth online magazine, says that though faith is personal, it is never private. If personal convictions are the engine room of faith but that is just the start, not the end, just as engines are just one part of a car, hearts and minds are also part of a body, personal faith must lead us beyond as Jesus sends out his disciples to take his message to the ends of the earth.

As you drive around Central Otago. An untamed land of desolate mountains, swift rivers, and unforgiving climate, besides rocks and snowy mountains,  
That is this... tree full of apples hanging without being picked. Red, ripped, beautiful apples hanging still... not enough workers or fear that the harvest will not be profitable.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”