

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost; July 24, 2022

+ Luke 10:1-12, 16-20 +

“Rejoice Proclaiming the Kingdom of God”

After this, the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. So ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. Go on your way. Look, I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. Do not carry a money bag or traveler’s bag or sandals. Do not greet anyone along the way. Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace be to this house.’ And if a peaceful person is there, your peace will rest on him, but if not, it will return to you. Remain in that same house, eating and drinking what they give you, because the worker is worthy of his pay. Do not keep moving from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they welcome you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are in the town and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’

“But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust from your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this: The kingdom of God has come near. I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on that day than for that town...

“Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!”

He told them, “I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Look, I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy. And nothing will ever harm you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names have been written in heaven.”

Jesus is sending out seventy-two missionaries. As he does, he gives them specific instructions about what to take, where to go, what to say, how long to stay, and when to leave. Lots and lots of commands about how to do this work of spreading God’s Word.

Later, when these six dozen missionaries return, they are thrilled, **“Lord, even the demon submit to us in your name.”** In response to that, Jesus gives them one more one more command: **“Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names have been written in heaven.”**

Today we are going to apply what Jesus says to these seventy-two to ourselves. Not all of it, because some it is specific just to them. But some of it is for all of Jesus’ followers of all time as they work to spread his Word. And we have to start here: **“Rejoice that your names have been written in heaven.”** The image Jesus uses pulls the Christian mind back to the prophet Daniel, and ahead to St. John’s Revelation. Both of these prophets write about a Book of Life in heaven, where the names of all who trust in Jesus have been written. On the Last Day, when Jesus returns, that Book of Life will be opened, and everyone whose name is found written there will be spend eternity in heaven.

Which leads to a key question: How do you get your name in there? How will your name be written in heaven, in the Book of Life? Actually, Jesus is sending out these seventy-two with the message that writes names in heaven, the message that saves for eternity.

And this is the message that Jesus tells the seventy-two to proclaim. He tells them to proclaim in places where they are welcomed and sheltered, and also in hostile places that drive them away: **“The kingdom of God has come near you.”** When Jesus the Son of God came down from earth to heaven, he brought the heavenly kingdom near to sinners like you and me. He came from God’s kingdom into our sinful world. While he was here, he spoke God’s truth perfectly, kept God’s commands perfectly, and trusted God completely.

Because Jesus lived this holy life for us, the kingdom of heaven is opened to us. In Jesus, we have the holiness we need to enter God’s presence and live with him forever. Not only did Jesus come from the kingdom to live for us, he also came to die for us. When he shed his blood on the cross, he washed away all our sins and the punishment we deserved. When he rose from the dead, he proved that the saving work he came to do was successful.

Jesus came from the kingdom. He brought the kingdom down to us, and opened it up to us with his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus sent the seventy-two out with that message so that more and more people would hear it and believe it. Because every time a person comes to faith in Jesus and what he did to open the kingdom, that person’s name is written in the Book of Life in God’s kingdom.

Jesus wants the seventy-two to rejoice because their own names are in the book; they trust Jesus came from the kingdom to this earth and opened the kingdom to them. In the joy of knowing their own names are written in heaven, they go out and tell others: **“The kingdom of God has come near to you.”**

Now here is what all of Jesus’ people have in common with those seventy-two. Not the commands to go two by two or to go without a moneybag or to avoid greeting people on our way. But this command: **“Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”** Sisters and brothers in Jesus, rejoice. Rejoice that the Holy Spirit has brought you to faith in Jesus. He brought Jesus salvation into your heart in baptism; he renews and refreshes your faith in Jesus with each Communion and each proclamation of what Jesus did to save you. On the Last Day, when that book is open, your name will be there, together with countless others who trust in Jesus. God give us joy! Let us rejoice that our names are written in heaven.

And then, like the seventy-two, may we go with the message that the kingdom of God has come near. May we go into our own homes to tell our own children and grandchildren that Jesus came from the kingdom and opened it up with his life, death, and resurrection. May we go to each other, who already believe it, with that message. Go to your neighbors and your coworkers. Send that message out your community and to your world by supporting this congregation and missionaries around the world with your offerings. The kingdom of God has come near in Christ. First rejoice that your name is written in heaven. And then go in joy with that message.

During this past week here at Trinity, it was a delight to be able to take that message of Jesus’ work to the children who belong to this congregation, to those who are friends, and to those who were new to us. The work didn’t look quite the way it looked for those seventy-two. There was no dust-shaking, no scorpion and snake-handling. Instead there were kids’ songs and arts and crafts and tasty snacks and playtime and animal stickers. But the message of the kingdom was there. God gives us joy that our names

are written in heaven. And this week we got to go in joy to tell children how, in Jesus, the kingdom of God has come near to them.

When the seventy-two went out in joy to proclaim the kingdom, it worked. They came back and reported, **“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!” He told them, “I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”** A few weeks ago a nice lady in this congregation asked me a deep question. (People always ask me these profound questions right after church when I’m mentally exhausted. And that’s fine. Maybe calling with them on Tuesday morning would be okay, too.) Anyway, she asked me if it was ever okay to hate. The answer is yes. We are to hate everything God hates. We are to hate sin and the devil. We hate them and want them to lose because they hate God, and we love him.

When the seventy-two proclaimed the kingdom, sin and Satan were losing. Sinners were coming to faith and becoming holy in God’s eyes through faith in his Son. Satan was losing his grip on souls, as new names were written in heaven. Jesus looked and saw Satan falling like lightning. When believers go in joy and proclaim the kingdom, what God hates loses. Sin loses. Satan loses. Jesus and his gospel win, taking hold of more and more hearts for eternity.

We prayed for good weather for our VBS, and we mostly got it. But there was lightning. Satan still falls like lightning whenever God’s joyful people proclaim Jesus’ gospel. Satan was losing this week, and Jesus was winning as the souls of little ones either came to faith in Jesus or grew in their faith.

This is our privilege as people of God. Whether it’s in a VBS, a quiet conversation with a friend, and devotion at the dinner table. To know in joy that heaven is ours, and to tell others how the kingdom has come near to them in Christ.

And Jesus is so good to us! If he only told us this much, we would feel so much pressure and worry and anxiety as we did this work. When people heard the message of Jesus’ love and didn’t believe it, we would have to wonder, “What did I do wrong? Why didn’t it work?” But listen to what Jesus tells the seventy-two and us: **“Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me.”** God is the one responsible for calling people to faith, growing his kingdom, writing names in heaven. The Father and Son send their Holy Spirit with the good news of the kingdom. The Spirit works in hearts. So when a person listens to Jesus’ love and believes it, we thank the Holy Spirit. When someone doesn’t listen, we don’t need to beat ourselves over it or worry about it or feel pressure. Growing the kingdom is the Spirit’s work, not ours. Whatever happens when the kingdom is proclaimed, it is never our personal success or failure.

There is no pressure in this work. No worry or anxiety. Just joy. Joy in knowing your name is written in heaven, and in the privilege of telling others how in Jesus the kingdom of God is theirs.

It’s right for us to thank all the members and friends of this congregation who with joy in their hearts worked to tell little children this week about the kingdom. It’s also right to thank all the parents who sent their kids to hear what Jesus has done for them – and to hope, that if they don’t have a church where they get to hear this good news, they might make Trinity theirs.

But it’s most important for us to thank God and rejoice in him. Because he gives us more opportunities than a VBS. He gives us our whole lives to rejoice knowing heaven is ours, and then to go in joy proclaiming the kingdom. When we do, he’s using us to spread that kingdom and to smash Satan. What an honor! And to do it with the comfort of knowing that the work of faith is all his. We just get to proclaim good news in joy.

Rejoice! **And tell them, "The kingdom of God has come near you."** Amen.