

Wesley United Methodist Church

July 7, 2019

“Have Superpowers, Will Travel.”

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20.

When you were a kid what superpowers did you want to have? Flying like Superman? Scaling tall buildings like Spiderman? What superpower did you want to have and how did you want to use it?

In our Bible reading for today, Jesus sent out seventy-two of his followers as an advance team to prepare the people for his ministry. And he gave them power—super power, really, to heal diseases and cast out demons. He also gave them authority to preach about the kingdom of God. And when the disciples got back, they felt like superheroes! They healed people. They had cast out demons.

And they had accomplished it all through Jesus’ name! Jesus was pleased with their work, but he didn’t want them to get big heads because of it. “Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you,” he said, “but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Author Corrie ten Boom once told the story of a woodpecker who tapped with his beak against the trunk of a tree just as lightning struck the tree and destroyed it. He flew away all excited, saying, “I didn’t know there was so much power in my beak.”

Corrie ten Boom wrote, “When we bring the Gospel to people there is a danger that we will think or say, ‘I have done a good job.’ Don’t be a silly woodpecker,” she continued. “Know where your strength comes from. It is only the Holy Spirit who can make a message good and fruitful.”

The disciples were rejoicing in the things they had done. Jesus wanted them to understand that it was the power of the Holy Spirit that was accomplishing these things through them.

Jesus could have used miracles and wonders, or charisma and fear tactics to spread the message of the kingdom of God. He had the power to draw large crowds, and his teaching left his hearers amazed. So why did he send out these seventy-two to do the work he could have done more effectively himself?

My guess is that it was for the same reason that his last words to the church, as recorded in Matthew 28: 18-20, were that we should go make disciples of all nations.

Jesus sent the seventy-two out, first of all, because he knew that they needed to see what he saw. They needed to feel the hurts and hear the questions from people who are living and dying without any knowledge of God, without any hope for the future.

When I recall my seminary days at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston ILL, I remember the days we were sent out to serve as chaplains in hospitals and nursing homes. It was rather easy and pleasant work to pray or counsel with the patients.

But everything changed in the third year and we were sent to Chicago’s the inner city homeless shelters and soup kitchens and to churches that care for the marginalized. We saw how unjust social systems kept poor people poor. We saw how hard the inner-city citizens worked just to survive, to support their families, to get justice from a system that treated them like “garbage.”

Most days, all we did was bandage them up and send them back out on the streets, so that they could get chewed up all over again.

We needed to see the world as Jesus sees it—full of desperately hurting people who need the justice, hope and mercy of the kingdom of God. Hurting people need more than words. They need someone to come live in their neighborhood and see their struggles.

The seventy-two that Jesus appointed to go ahead of him needed that experience as well...and so do we. We need to get outside these four church walls to see the need that Jesus saw. Jesus also sent out the seventy-two to do these works of ministry because we don’t really know what joy is until we have put our faith into practice. It’s one thing to believe something with our hearts it’s another for that belief to take residence in our hearts. That only happens when we actively practicing what we preach.

What would it look like if WE brought the kingdom of God to flophouses and soup kitchens and prisons and homeless shelters? Do we really believe in the justice and compassion and mercy of the kingdom of God, or do we just like to hear cheerful messages about it on Sunday? If the message of Jesus cannot hold up when faced with the cold, hard reality of people’s lives, then it’s not from God.

Those seventy-two disciples that Jesus sent out saw God’s power in action, changing lives, and they came back from their mission overflowing with joy.

And Jesus celebrated with them. He said that their ministry was defeating the power of Satan on earth.

Jesus had given them power to drive out Satan. Regardless of how we feel about Satan, however, all of us will agree that we live in a world in which the power of hatred and injustice and cruelty are all too common. Where is hope in such a world? It is found in those who follow Jesus out into the world.

That is why Jesus sent out the seventy-two into the world and also why he sends us out. He sends us out because he knows that we need to get outside these four church walls to see the needs that he sees. He sends us out because we don't really know what real joy is until we have put our faith into practice. He sends us out because sharing our faith and alleviating suffering in our community have the power to drive out everything that associates with evil.

Jesus sends us out today like he sent out the seventy-two—to plant the kingdom of God in hearts and lives. After all, there is no superpower that can compare to the power of knowing God through Jesus Christ. This is the power that gives life meaning and purpose. This is the power that gives us our identity and self-worth. This is the power that allows us to overcome the world. And if your life has been changed by this power, then you are called to go to witness, and to share the kingdom of God and the power of salvation with a hungry and hurting world.