

# Handed Over to Me

*Luke 10:17-24*

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17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' <sup>18</sup>He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. <sup>19</sup>See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. <sup>20</sup>Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

21 At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>22</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'

23 Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! <sup>24</sup>For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.'

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About six years ago, I joined 16 others on a mission trip to Honduras. Although there were weeks of preparation for what we would experience on this trip, I was still pretty wide-eyed upon my arrival to Honduras. As we pulled out of the capital city of Tegucigalpa on an old school bus, one of the first things my wide eyes were drawn to were the hundreds of small shacks that littered the sides of the mountains, many constructed of scrap metal and old commercial signs. One of the more experienced members of our group saw what I was looking at. "It's amazing isn't it?" he said. "Worst

of all, if a good rain comes, all of those shacks will be washed to the bottom.” That was the first of many eye-opening experiences that got my attention that week.

So that we could fill our suitcases with medical supplies, cookies, and VBS materials, our personal packing lists had been relatively tight. Though we packed several sets of work clothes, about the only other thing we packed multiples of were toothbrushes (just in case, out of habit we stuck it under the local running water while brushing our teeth). There was no room for anything extra. Nor was there a need for a cell phone – the coverage was pretty sparse. This was a week where we would need to get by on the bare minimum.

I didn’t fully realize that the “bare minimum” would also apply to meal times in Honduras. Breakfast each day consisted of eggs, tortillas, and beans. Lunch would be a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with chips and an apple. Dinner was usually a little more substantial, but nothing fancy. Mostly shredded chicken, beans, rice, and tortillas. The amazing thing was, I later learned that our hosts only served chicken when groups were in town. That was a special treat they did without most of the year.

Bare minimum also applied to our daily travel. Each morning, we traveled with an armed escort from our lodging to the small village of Agua Amarilla. The trip wasn’t much more than 20 miles, but on the narrow dirt roads pockmarked with potholes, it was nearly a two hour trip. Along the way, we would pass through little villages and sprawling countryside, as well as cross steep mountain passes. Finally, when we got as close to the village as the Land-Cruisers could handle, we trekked the last little bit by foot. And after crossing a river by stepping on exposed stones – something the barefoot local kids made look far easier than it was – we finally arrived in the village: about five homes within a football field’s length of each other, and a one-room schoolhouse built by the Honduran government. Yet another example of bare minimum.

For three and one-half days, part of our team worked to improve the health of the community by building latrines and adding chimneys to the small homes of the village –

which was actually much more than the five homes initially visible. Meanwhile, the rest of the team led a VBS for the local kids. Each day, the number of kids who participated grew larger. By the third day, nearly 100 kids were spilling out of the one room schoolhouse, many of them having travelled miles on foot from neighboring villages to participate.

While I have numerous memories of my week in Agua Amarilla implanted in my brain, several stand out. The first was when a member of our team returned from putting a chimney in a house. A native of Matamoros, Mexico, he was not unfamiliar with areas of poverty. Yet, he came up to me shaking his head and said, “These people have nothing.” And he was right. Most of their homes were one open room with a fire pit in the center and a few small items around the walls.

The fiesta we held on our last day in the village was also memorable. To celebrate the work we did with the local villagers, we barbequed beef for fajitas over an open pit. The villagers chowed down on this meal. I was told this would likely be the only meat they would get all year...and they ate as if this were the case.

The third impression left on my mind while in Agua Amarilla was one of the “take-home” pieces from the VBS. During the week, we took an individual photo of every kid who came to VBS. Then, using a small photo printer, we gave each kid their picture. Most of these kids had never before seen what they looked like. They didn’t have mirrors or cameras or anything else. But now, they firmly clasped their pictures in their hands as they headed towards home. They now had an identity.

That week in Honduras gave me a new appreciation for what I had, perhaps no more noticeably that when we arrived in Miami on the return flight home. There, with several hours to kill before our connecting flight to Dallas, I realized how different this was from where I had just been – things that you and I normally don’t think twice about. There were countless food choices within steps of each other. The TVs in the restaurants were showing the NFL playoff game, and travelling fans were packed in to purchase food and

drinks. A little further down the concourse were shops featuring jewelry and electronics and clothes. And the fact was, unlike the people I had been with all week, I had money in my wallet to buy food. I knew that at home I had a TV and perhaps even the time and resources to buy a ticket to the game. Even with the high markup characteristic of an airport vendor, I could have reasonably bought clothes or electronics without too much of a hit to my way of life. And it was that week that gave me a different appreciation for our scripture lesson this morning from Luke 10.

The text read this morning picks up as the 70 team members sent on a mission by Jesus return home. But to fully understand their testimony and the experiences they had, it helps to know the back story. This back story begins in Luke 5 when Jesus selects the first disciples along the Sea of Gennesaret (or Galilee). Then in Chapter 6, after a night of prayer, Jesus calls all of his followers together and selects twelve to be apostles – to be followers he would send in his name.

But here's the interesting thing. After selecting these apostles, Jesus doesn't kiss them on the forehead and say "good luck." He doesn't immediately send them out. Instead they have some learning to do first. And it's the first verse of Luke 8, Luke 9, and Luke 10 that shows us how this worked. Luke 8 opens with Jesus going through the cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And, almost as a side note, this verse says, "The twelve were with him." But that's huge. Jesus modeled the work for them. Before they were sent out in mission themselves, they had the opportunity to watch Jesus first; to learn from him, to see lives changed, and to witness how this work was resourced by others.

Then in the first verse of Luke 9, Jesus calls the Twelve together and gives them to power and authority to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. Almost like an internship, he sends them out with the understanding that they would come back to him to debrief their experiences. And in the process, Jesus expanded his reach by sharing his ministry with twelve others.

But Jesus didn't stop there. In the first verse of Luke 10, Jesus appoints seventy others and sends them out in pairs. By choosing seventy, he then had one missionary for every known nation on earth at that time. Yet before they leave, Jesus gathers them together for a final word. He tells them that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. He warns them that he is sending them out on a dangerous assignment and that they are to pack lightly – no purse, no bag, no sandals. That means no extra clothes, no food, no money, nothing else of value. It was a true bare minimum. They were to be dependent upon the hospitality of others. And after a few more instructions about what to do when they arrived at their sites, Jesus sends them on their way.

What's amazing to me about this story is that Jesus has now entrusted his ministry to people beyond the original twelve disciples. The chief steward has made these seventy stewards of his ministry. And perhaps, just like they were seeing their own picture for the very first time, these seventy now had an identity. They were missionaries of Christ – his hands and feet and heart and mind in the world.

Our scripture lesson this morning finds the seventy back with Jesus. Just like when you pick up your kid from camp, these exuberant missionaries couldn't wait to tell Jesus what they had done. "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" This report wasn't really about their individual triumph over these evil figures, but about a ministry and power that was mushrooming. Earlier in Luke 9, the twelve had been unable to help a boy plagued by demons (9:40). But, now, even the demons were succumbing to the power of Christ's name entrusted to the seventy. As Jesus' ministry expanded, they were able to do even more for the kingdom than what had been done in the past...and the seventy were beyond excited!

You and I know what this joy looks like. You've seen it in the young co-worker who bursts into your office with a big smile on his face having just seen the quarterly sales figures. Or you've seen it when your kid comes home "sky-high" about the "A" he received on his math test. Maybe that was you not too long ago. But now, with the

wisdom of age, you see things differently. You now know that one good quarter does not solely make a business successful. One good grade doesn't mean you've passed the class. We know this because we see the big picture. And so did Jesus.

Upon seeing their joy, Jesus responds with a type of vision statement known by the Greek word *chreia* (cray-ah). In this *chreia*, Jesus sees Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. This wasn't a mythological vision of Satan's fall from heaven, but a statement which looked ahead; which saw the big picture; which tied this mission to Jesus' coming resurrection and its triumph over evil. To bolster this vision, he then provides a rationale for why this is and will be the case. These things were handed over to him and something he handed over to the seventy. Then Jesus concludes with what's known in fancy theological terms as an "opposite." Don't rejoice in your short term success – your ability to have demons submit to you. Rejoice in the long term success – your eternal life – your inclusion in heaven.

Here, Jesus masterfully gives us a pattern. Having properly framed the accomplishments and joy of the seventy, Jesus, the chief steward, offers a prayer of a steward. "Father, I thank you." Jesus prays, "that you have (given) these things...to infants." In other words, Jesus prayed: "God, I thank you that you have entrusted things to people who don't fully understand what is going on; to people who, whether they realize it or not, are dependent on you for everything. Prophets and kings...they wish they could have seen and heard these things. Instead, God you chose to trust this to average, everyday people, who are trying to follow you." And then Jesus concludes his prayer with a blessing, reminding the seventy that God's favor had come upon them.

For the next three weeks here at First Christian, with the help of prayers like this, we are asking the question, "What Shall We Bring?" As we think about the mission Christ is calling this church to in 2019, we're looking for a packing list or instruction about what to bring. We know well that we've been entrusted with Jesus' ministry in this place and in this community. And that means we've been challenged to be stewards of this ministry

and of the resources entrusted to it. We have to get this right if we want Christ's reach to be extended through us.

That's why I think the wisdom of this morning's prayer of a steward is so important. The seventy were sent in pairs. Certainly, they could do more together than separate. But more than that, going with another provided mutual support. That's why you always see Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses in your neighborhood in pairs, and why our Elders and Diaconate team up on Sunday afternoons to visit our homebound members. All of us are braver when someone else is with us. On our journeys of life, our church is our teammate going with us hand-in-hand. Your church serves as your ministry partner – your spiritual partner - supporting you, encouraging you, and resourcing you through every phase of life as you serve your family and community in Christ's name.

Likewise, there is wisdom in the singularity of purpose Jesus asked of his followers. Don't get sidetracked. Don't get bogged down by all your stuff. Instead, take on an attitude of sacrifice and humility. Have a proclivity for simplicity. The same is true for us. Think about it: what would happen if we singularly focused all of our time, talent, and treasure on the mission Christ has given to this church? Instead of spreading ourselves thin across a number of good things, what would happen if we invested our whole lives in one great thing; one great church; one great community of faith? Imagine the impact we could make across the street at Midwestern. Imagine the impact we could have with the families who trust their children to us each day at Children Come First or the Young Ages School, and with the children and youth and their families who call First Christian home. Imagine the impact we could have on the lives of those seeking transformation through the ministries of Common Ground.

Earlier, I shared some of the enduring memories of my time in Honduras. But, perhaps the one memory that is most firmly embedded in my brain is what we did each day as we traveled back to our lodging from Agua Amarilla. As the Land Cruisers bounced down the roads, every time we saw kids or a family, we threw a handful of candy

out the window to them. The first day, there was a bit of surprise and shock as we did this. By the third day, kids (and even a few adults) came running across the fields and bursting out of their homes as we came down the road. You could hear their squeals of delight as they ran to gather all of the candy they could. But, their delight was only half of the joy that I felt. Every morning, I bought more candy at a local store to throw out the window that afternoon. And every afternoon, I finished the trip with a huge smile on my face...and with the resolve to buy even more tomorrow; to spread even more joy.

That's the privileged role of a disciple of Jesus Christ. As Luke noted in capturing Jesus' prayer, seeing and hearing involve both gift and responsiveness. And when we respond with the gifts that have been entrusted to us, we know the joy that makes all of the difference...not just short-term, but for eternity.

All of us are privileged to have an identity. We are identified as a follower of Christ. But the question is...is that what the world sees when they look at us? Do they see people who know the joy and delight of extravagantly throwing our gifts out the window to a world who needs what we can offer? Or do they see people holding fast to an illusion of independence, an illusion that by gripping tightly to what we have, we can insulate ourselves from the storms of life; that we can do without each other or without God? Are we just one bad storm away from being washed away?

What shall we bring? How about our confidence and trust that one who sends us out to do good works also equips us (and will continue to extravagantly equip us) with every good thing we need to do that work. When we open our hands and our hearts to follow Christ, we know that we can pack light, because our perspective on "bare minimum" has changed by his unyielding maximum. And the joy that comes with that will make us wide-eyed to what God is doing in us and through us.