

First Presbyterian Church  
Life Lessons from Luke: Commissioning  
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2 Kings 2:9-18; Luke 10:1-20

Are any of you who were here last Sunday experiencing a little bit of cognitive dissonance? Oh, so what is cognitive dissonance? It is the psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously. In other words, it is the conflict arising from this morning's words of Jesus: "*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.* <sup>14</sup> *Indeed, at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you.* <sup>15</sup> *And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades,*" with the words of Jesus last week when he rebuked his disciples for wanting to rain down fire and brimstone on a couple of Samaritan cities that would not receive Jesus. So how do we understand the change in attitude? How do we reconcile the saving of one group of people and the seeming condemnation of another? And then on a final question, what do we do with the demons and the devil in this passage? The answers my friends lie in context and commissioning. Let me explain.

The story for this week is about Jesus commissioning seventy-two individuals to go out in pairs to all the towns where Jesus was planning to go. They were to be humble and content with whatever accommodations and food that were set before them. They were to offer the peace of God to the people who accepted them. They were to cure the sick, and above all to say to the people, "*The kingdom of God has come near to you.*" It is this phrase that gives us our first clue as to how we deal with our cognitive dissonance. What the disciples meant by "*The Kingdom of God has come near you,*" is that the rule and reign of God was once again being established on earth and it was being established by Jesus of Nazareth. This rule and reign was to be a time of peace, hope, love, joy, and compassion. It was to be a time in which everyone got to sit under their own vine and fig-tree and eat the produce of their hands. It was to be the time, as Jesus taught his disciples to pray, that things on earth would be like things in heaven. This was a transformative moment, and all persons were invited to participate.

The second clue as to how to deal with our cognitive dissonance comes from the context in which these words and this invitation into the Kingdom of God are being offered. The context as I have spoken about before is that of a growing hatred, anger, and violence in the Galilee, Jerusalem, and the entire nation. There was a growing move toward rebellion not only against Rome and the Roman client rulers, but against the religious leadership at the Temple, whom many Jews believed to be corrupt. This anger and hatred were beginning to drive individuals and groups to open acts of rebellion, but even more, to organizing for a revolution; a revolution that would ultimately bring about the deaths of thousands of Jews, the destruction of the Temple, and eviction of the Jews from their homeland as had happened under the Babylonians. Jesus could see all this developing and he knew that unless the people chose a different path that they would suffer greatly. So, for Jesus it was a choice that all cities and communities would have to

make. Either they would accept the invitation to be part of this inbreaking Kingdom of God, in which God's love and peace became the center of their lives; or they would choose the way of the world, a way of violence and destruction, which is evidently what Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had chosen. They had chosen not to repent, meaning to turn from the ways of violence and destruction and toward the Kingdom of God of love and peace. Their end then would not be good and the judgment would come in this world in real time. Thus, Jesus' words of warning are not some end times judgment on the people of those cities. He is not bringing fire and brimstone down from heaven. He is showing them what will happen if they continue their current path.

What does this have to do with us? The answer is rather straightforward. We too have been commissioned to invite people into this inbreaking Kingdom of God. Just as the seventy-two were sent out into the world to invite people into this way of being people of love, compassion, and peace, we are called on to do the same. Our commissioning matters because we too live in a time of growing anger, hatred, and violence. We too live in a time in which people are turning on one another. We too live in a time in which the nation is divided. And it is into this difficult moment that we are called to come with message of love, hope, peace, compassion, and justice. We are commissioned to be those who offer hope amid all that the world can bring against us. I understand how difficult this commissioning can be. It is easier for all of us to see the "other" as the enemy; to cast aspersions on people we have never met; to believe the worst rather than the best about others. There is a certain satisfaction in those feelings. But those are not the tasks to which we have been commissioned. Instead, we are commissioned to be the light in the darkness. To be a people who pursue peace rather than anger. And when this task seems hopeless and overwhelming, we need to turn to the end of this text about the demons and the devil.

What I mean by this is that the power of the Kingdom of God is greater than the power of hatred, anger, and violence. When the disciples return, they speak of their victories over the demons, meaning the powers of this world that take hold of people and communities and wreak havoc. When Jesus said he saw Satan fall, he is not speaking literally but figuratively of the evil falling to the power of God's love and grace. In essence, Jesus is saying that nothing can ultimately stop this Kingdom of God from coming into the world and changing everything.

My friends, this morning I want you to know that there is hope. There is hope because the Kingdom is coming. There is hope because Christ is here. There is hope because the Spirit is at work. My challenge to you this morning then is this, to ask yourselves, how am I living out my commission to offer people an invitation into this inbreaking Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ?