

¹*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.*

²*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. ³Go your way. Look, I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. ⁴Do not carry a money bag or traveler's bag or sandals. Do not greet anyone along the way. ⁵Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace be to this house.’ ⁶And if a peaceful person is there, your peace will rest on him, but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain 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. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and they welcome you, eat what is set before you. ⁹Heal the sick who are in the town and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near you.’*

¹⁰*“But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹‘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.’ ¹²I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on that day than for that town.*

¹⁶*Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”*

¹⁷*The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!”*

¹⁸*He told them, “I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹Look, 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. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names have been written in heaven.”*

Into a college gym filed 500-plus people. Sitting on bleachers and chairs, everyone stood as the organ began to play, and three students dressed in white robes carried a cross and two candles across the court to the stage set up on the opposite baseline. As with one voice, the group belted out the words, “Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest, and make our hearts your place of rest.” The hymn ended and worship continued. A responsive prayer. A couple readings from scripture. A sermon pointing the people to Christ. And then the part people traveled from near and far to experience. The synod president stepped to the lectern, and one-by-one, alphabetically, read a name and a place. A name and a place. It was teacher call day, and all the newly minted teachers were finding out where they had been assigned and called to. Some were called close to home, not too far from family or where they had gone to school. But others were called to far places across the country, like California, Texas, and Alaska. At breakfast they didn’t know where they would live after graduation and by supper, they’d have Facebook

messages and emails welcoming them to a city that they still didn't know how to pronounce. It's an exciting day, but it's an intimidating day too.

I'm guessing Jesus' disciples had similar feelings of anticipation and anxiety as Jesus gathered up seventy-two for a special assignment. Two-by-two they would go, forming thirty-one mission teams to cover every town he was about to travel to. Hand-picked he would send them to prepare the way for Jesus, to tell people the good news of the Messiah that God had finally sent. But they didn't know what to expect. It wasn't like they had experienced anything like this before. And I would guess, many were traveling to towns that were foreign to them. What could they expect? What would happen to them when they got there? Sure, they were excited that Jesus, their God and Lord, would use them in his service. It was an honor. But it was also intimidating.

Why go? Why wouldn't they just give into the intimidation of the unknown and refuse to serve? Well, I think Jesus makes it clear in his instructions to them: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." There was a lot of work to be done. There were plenty of people who were not ready to meet Jesus. They were stuck in their sins and unbelief. They lived without hope of restoration in the Savior. The harvest was plentiful, but there were so few harvest workers. So, Jesus called the seventy-two to work the fields for heaven.

The call our pastors, teachers, and staff ministers receive is not exactly the same as the call of the seventy-two. Jesus does not line them up and say, "You go here and you go there." But Christ does call men and women to public ministry service through the call extended by churches and schools. He sends them to places unknown to serve people unknown with the one thing they are most certain about: Salvation in the blood of Jesus.

Talking about that MLC graduating class, I met a couple at my brother's wedding a week and a half ago who just got married on Friday and will be moving to Colorado right after their honeymoon to serve as teachers. Neither have lived in Colorado or have family in Colorado. In fact, they just bought a house there sight unseen. I'm sure they've got plenty of concerns, but they also are excited. They don't know the best doctors to go to or even the best grocery stores to shop at, but they know two things: One, this is where God wants them to be. It's his call, working through the assignment committee and the schools who have called them. Whether they end up enjoying living in Colorado or not, this is the field God has placed them in to work. And two, they are not going unequipped. Just like Jesus sending out the seventy-two, they may feel short-handed and alone at times, but God sends them with what is most important: the gospel seed that they are to sow.

But Jesus didn't promise that public ministry would be sunshine and rainbows. He said, "I am sending you out as lambs among wolves." Some would hear their gospel witness and come to love Jesus. But others would reject it. As you know from the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark,

Luke, and John – Jesus’ ministry would be fraught with rejection. And if people would reject Jesus after seeing them himself, how would they treat a messenger of Jesus?

Ministry work can be really hard. I got to watch my wife serve in public gospel ministry at WELS schools for two years while I was finishing up at seminary. She could tell you plenty of stories of the challenges of ministry, from parents calling late at night to literally scream at her over the phone to kids making threats of school shootings. But she also could tell you even more stories about the joys of ministry, watching a school and church community wrap their arms around a little girl who had just lost her dad or sitting in church as one of her students got baptized along with the rest of the family, a student who first heard about baptism in her class.

I can speak from my own experience too. Ministry is not always easy. It’s a sinful shepherd shepherding sinful sheep. This means my days can be messy because of my sins and the sins of the people I have the privilege of serving. Public ministry can be tough. But it’s also filled with blessings upon blessings. I get to sit front row as the light comes on for a person during a Bible information class and they see Jesus like they never saw him before. I get to stand next to the family and pour water on their baby’s head and speak those words of God which adopt them into God’s family. I get to stand at the rail and tell the congregation that through the body and blood of Jesus, their sins are forgiven. I get to sit by the side of the sick and dying and remind them that their home is in heaven. And I have not earned the right to do these things. Instead, God has given me the privilege to be his instrument and share not my word, but his. Public ministry, like everything in life, is filled with the most immense challenges and the most undeserved blessings. Lambs among wolves. That’s why Jesus said. But good thing those lambs have the Good Shepherd leading them!

I’ll admit, this sermon has been heavily focused on public ministry. For almost everybody in the congregation, you never have been and never will be called to public ministry. And that’s ok, because if we were all pastors and teachers, who would dig the basements or make sure we were healthy or raise the cattle and crops that become delicious meals on our tables or every other important task in God’s creation that he gives people to do? This is not the sermon to tell you public ministry is the most important work or the workers that God loves the most.

But here’s where you come in. Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” Before you get angry at Jesus for being a “problems guy” and not a “solutions guy,” listen to what he says next: “So ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.” Ask. Go to God about it. I’m sure you’re not unaware of our church body’s pastor and teacher shortage. It’s been that way for a few years and probably will stretch on for the next decade. Our own churches have felt the weight of this shortage with a two-year vacancy. But instead of wringing our hands about it, let’s pray about it. “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.” And know that he will answer those prayers. He will provide for

us – even though our synod is only a tiny sliver of Christendom – with the workers we need to continue to carry out ministry, even if we still see it as a shortage.

But don't stop with prayer. Encourage. I know we have young people at both churches who are considering service in the public ministry. And I would guess there are plenty more people who have kicked around the idea, "Could I be a pastor? Could I be a teacher?" in their minds from time-to-time. The harvest fields are ripe. Do you know someone you think has the gifts to serve in one of these roles? Tell them.

Finally, after you've prayed about it, and after you've identified and encouraged people you think would serve well as pastors or teachers, ask the question of yourself. Could you see yourself standing in front of a classroom of little lambs, heeding Christ's call to "let the little children come to me"? Could you see yourself sitting in the living room of a shut-in or leading a Bible class? The work can be hard, but the blessings outweigh the hardships many times over.

And if you're thinking to yourself, "I would love to serve as a pastor or teacher, but I'm too old," look at this month's forward in Christ. It has pictures of all the new pastors and teachers that just got calls into the ministry. Some of these new called workers are in their fifties and sixties. I knew a man when I was in school who retired from his job at sixty-five, studied for a few years to become a pastor, then served for a few years until health problems led him to retire from pastoral ministry. His labor in the harvest fields was short, but I'm certain he would say it was worth it.

Pray, encourage, and consider. That's your role as you think about ministry, not just the ministry of our congregation, but of our church body at large and of gospel ministry in general. Because God uses you to staff his church, whether it's the young lady who looks at the teaching ministry and says, "Here I am. Send me," or the old man at church who pulls the teenager who sits in front of him at church aside and tells him he should think about being a pastor. It's the woman sitting confined to her chair who can't serve as a teacher, but she prays for all the men and women who will go out to shepherd God's flock, big and small.

Friends, this is not the only way to serve God. Nor is it a better way than any other good profession. But there are fields that need harvesting, and the workers are few. So pray, encourage, and consider. This is how God will use you to provide for his church.