



Rev. Ellen Dawson - 9.29.19

"When To Rejoice"

Psalm 103:1-5, 20-22; Luke 10:1-20

Old Testament Reading --

Psalm 103:1-5, 20-22

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. 20 Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word. 21 Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will. 22 Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

New Testament Reading --Luke 10: 1-20

The Mission of the Seventy

1 After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from

house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to 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 of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' 12 I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

Woes to Unrepentant Cities

13 "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. 14 But at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. 15 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

The Return of the Seventy

17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" 18 He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. 19 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. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

This morning, I'd like to ask you to consider what brings you joy: I mean TRUE JOY--that wild happiness, that uninhibited contentment, that true light-heartedness that makes you smile, laugh, dance, or hug someone?

Joy is an emotion that actually affects the community around us because it is known to be contagious. But some people struggle with feeling joy. They just can't recognize it or feel it, most likely because of things like stress, being too busy, depression, pain, loneliness, anxiety, or even, just because they haven't made a *real effort* to see it or feel it.

The popular author and organizer, Marie Kondo, explains to her clients that when they are sorting their possessions, they are only to keep things that "spark joy" in them. And what is the reaction? Mostly, confusion. She has to reiterate this point over and over again until they understand...joy is a feeling, and for some people it's much deeper inside them than they realized.

I think most of us could agree with several of the things on the list of the HuffPost article "101 Ways to Bring Joy Into Your Day," -- from things like clean sheets and bubble baths, to laughing over dinner with friends or paying for coffee for the person behind you in line -- we, as humans, experience joy in a variety of ways because we were created for it. And how do we show joy? We rejoice. Rejoicing is an expression of our joy and happiness. In the Christian tradition, it is a response in gratitude. We rejoice through praise, singing, laughing, smiling, and sharing - sharing that joy with others.

In today's passage, we read about the 70 disciples who were sent out by Jesus. So that we understand the timeline, this sending out of people to share the Gospel came after Jesus had been teaching and healing, and quite literally, feeding people, as we read in the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. The Transfiguration had also occurred by this time, which is the event when Jesus went up on a mountain and became radiant, transforming in front of 3 of his disciples. He was seen talking to who appeared to be Elijah and Moses, and a voice came from a cloud, saying "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

I tell you this because the 70 were sent out at a time when it was becoming more and more clear that he was, in fact, the Messiah.

So we would assume that if Jesus was sending them out ahead of him, they would be excited. They would be rejoicing.

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However, brothers and sisters, I'm going to guess that these other Christ-followers did not go out high-fiving and skipping and celebrating. Here's why:

... Jesus said "I am sending you out like lambs among wolves;"

... Jesus said take the bare necessities and eat whatever they put in front of you;

... Jesus told them 'alot of people are not going to like what you do or what you have to say';

... Jesus spoke of entire towns who had chosen not to repent, and that they, as his disciples, would also face alot of rejection because there were people who would rather hold on to their ways than accept The Way;

So, we can easily understand why these disciples didn't rejoice, right?

But they went. They went with clear instructions. They went in humility, obedience, and hope. They went, despite the fact that they weren't going out with joy.

They were also going out with power and authority.

Remember that these close followers had already seen what Jesus could do. He had healed people, he had sent demons running, He had raised people from the dead. He had clearly

exercised his power and his authority over *all* things. Over nature, over demons, and even eventually, over death itself.

Consider what Luke writes in Chapter 8 -- Jesus heals the man in the countryside of the Gerasenes. When Jesus said to the man, "What is your name," He answered, "Legion," which literally means and refers to a body of over 6000 "soldiers." This man was possessed by many many demons. Not just one. But Jesus commanded the spirit-- *all* of the evil entities--to come out of the man. And they did.

So, the disciples -- both the original 12, and now these 70, had been given this same power, and the same authority.

But are power and authority the same thing? No. We cannot confuse them.

On the website *The Urban Alternative*, Dr. Tony Evans writes, "In a football game, the players tower over the referees. The players are bigger, stronger and more powerful than the older, smaller and, often, out-of- shape referees. In a game, the players can use their power to knock you down, but the referees can use their authority to put you out of the game. Never confuse power with authority."

Now that's football. But what about in these situations of faith?

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Sam Hamstra, Jr. a writer for the *Baker's Dictionary of the Bible* explains, "From a theological perspective...The question of authority is a fundamental issue facing every person, especially the believer. Its significance cannot be overestimated. Every person has an authority in life that he or she submits to as a subordinate, not by constraint but by conviction. God has created human beings to live under his authority. When [people] choose to live under a different rule, that of self or an idol, they sin. [Even in Genesis, scripture] illustrates the human tendency, moved by pride, to seek independence from external authority and to establish self as the final authority in life."

What this tells us is this: when control and pride move us to have power, and when power becomes the motivator -- that is when trouble begins to brew.

We see this in so many aspects of life. In politics - who here hasn't heard of a corrupt politician working behind the scenes to get a bill passed that will benefit his or her pocketbook?

We see it in family systems - when a sibling or cousin or in-law seems to have the opinion that nobody wants to challenge, because their ability to manipulate and control the family dynamics has gone on for way too many years and the family members fear the backlash of standing up to that person.

The question of power even comes up when community members challenge community leaders who don't operate with the right amount of transparency, because knowledge is power, right? This issue has even come up here in our own school district.

In the Gospel of Luke we see that all 70 of these appointed disciples returned with joy.

They came back to Jesus and to each other, rejoicing!

...and what is the main reason for their happiness?

They say, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!"

Were they excited because people had been healed?

Were they jumping up and down because whole towns had repented?

Were they rejoicing because people came to know about Jesus?

They were rejoicing because demons were submitting to them, and because they now know they have power .

Jesus says wait a second...don't rejoice -- Do not rejoice at this. Jesus says rejoice that your

names are written in heaven. That you are known and that you are saved and that you are a beloved child of God. Jesus says to them rejoice because you have helped others.

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You see, when power is involved, priorities get out of whack. What I see in this passage is that the 70 went out in humility, obedience, hope, and faithfulness. But those things went out the door once they got a taste of power. By Casting out demons, they felt that they were in control and that they now had power.

And sure, it was power in the name of Jesus -- but I am sure this power also brought them attention from people in the crowds and a sense that they were unstoppable.

Power became the focus.

And here's the irony in that .

The word exorcism has its root in the Greek word *exousia* , meaning oath; when translated to English, it means to adjure, [or urge]. Thus, to exorcise doesn't really mean "cast out" as much as it means "putting the Devil on oath or invoking a higher authority to compel the Devil to act in a way contrary to its wishes (Guiley 87)." 1

Jesus turns it back to authority - his authority and the authority of his Father in heaven. He tells these disciples that their mission is about the authority of God at work, instead of their power in action.

But, am I being to hard on these disciples? I don't think so, because there is evidence that as the Gospel spread and as the church was starting to be established, even then, there were problems with understanding power vs. authority. What we read throughout scripture is that when power is given, it is the power of God, in and through the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of growing together, living together, and seeking to share and show the love they know in Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we even have issues with this in our churches. We can read about how even in the early church, the love of power was alive and well.

In the book of Acts, Paul shares about his conversion, reminding the earliest disciples: God said "I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

In Galatians, Paul writes, "Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill[b] the law of Christ. 3 For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. 4 All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride."

1 <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist257/stephwhit/final/exorcism.html>

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In the book of Ephesians, we read: 12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

But then, we are reminded by Jesus himself....before ascending into heaven, said to his disciples gathered in Jerusalem: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." This is the power that we are to reach for. The power to heal, to help, to share HIS LOVE.

So, when are we to rejoice? Not when we feel control that makes us feel powerful.

We are to rejoice when we see we are a part of sharing the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

We are to rejoice when we as followers of Christ are weak, because it means we have to rely on each other and the power of God to come together as a community of faith. And finally, if you continue to read on in Luke Chapter 10, you'll see that Jesus models for us the things for which we are to rejoice:

...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...All things have been handed over to me by my Father; Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! 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.'

Jesus rejoices, telling them to also rejoice at the fact that they have seen these things with their eyes. That they know Jesus personally. That they are witnesses, that they are chosen, that they are the ones who have been called to show the love of God in his Son.

We, too, are to rejoice at what we see --

When we see Jesus in our midst, as we show compassion to one another.

When we see the power of the Holy Spirit at work, as prayers are offered and answered.

When we see each other offering forgiveness and pursuing reconciliation.

When we see humility, kindness, peace, patience, and faithfulness in action, through worship, education, committee meetings, service and fellowship.

We are to rejoice, not when we feel power and control, when we make decisions that look or sound good. We are to rejoice when we and all around us see Jesus and point to Jesus as the one and only authority in our lives.