

July 4, 2010
Luke 10:1-24
Reason to Rejoice
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This is a big passage. There's a lot going on here. I'm going to read this whole passage, so we see the big picture of what's going on. But the part that we're going to focus on this morning – so you can pay special attention – begins in verse 17.

[Read Luke 10:1-24]

The whole undertaking is successful.
 Surprisingly successful.
 Wildly successful.
 Almost unbelievably successful.

Jesus sends out seventy-two no-name workers, and the results are surprisingly, wildly, nearly unbelievably successful.

Luke doesn't tell us who these seventy-two workers are. They're people who have been following Jesus around for a while (though, how long for each of them, we don't know). Maybe they've been following Jesus simply because they've been caught by who he is and what he's been doing. Seventy-two is a big crowd...who even knows how much personal contact Jesus had with any one of them? And for all we know, they might as well just be average Joes and Janes. We can't really say much about them at all. Luke doesn't even tell us where they've been before chapter 10. And even before the story about them closes, Jesus turns and speaks privately to the Twelve. And while Jesus is turned to the side, the Seventy-two quietly slip off the scene, and we don't see or hear from them again.

As Luke tells their story, he doesn't even bother to give them names. They don't even have a representative among them who's given a name. Just a group of seventy-two “*others*”. (And, from everything we don't know, likely a group of seventy-two underdogs.)

And somehow, their mission turns out to be surprisingly, wildly, nearly-unbelievably successful.

Imagine what it's like to be these 'others.'

They're likely part of an even larger group of people who have been following Jesus, and Jesus calls out these seventy-two. (A significant number, by the way: the people of this time understood the world as consisting of seventy-two nations. So – symbolically, anyway – this was the very beginning of the gospel going out to the world.)

And Jesus tells the Seventy-two, “Your job is to go on ahead of me. There are places I'm planning on visiting, and I want *you* to go there first. Prepare these cities, so they're ready for me when I come to them. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”

And then Jesus tells them, “I'm sending you out like lambs among wolves. Don't bring anything you need. Don't dilly-dally along the way (your mission is urgent). Rely completely on the hospitality of strangers.

“If people welcome you, stay there. Heal them and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'”

“And if you enter a town and you're not welcomed, don't stick around (there are other places where people *will* be receptive). Shake the dust off your feet and tell them, 'There will be consequences for rejecting God's coming.'”

Now, these Seventy-two have probably been following Jesus long enough to know that Jesus' work is not easy. They've probably seen the rejection he's faced. They've probably seen some of the danger Jesus himself has encountered along the way. And this rag-tag group of no-names isn't being sent out in groups of, say, twelve. Jesus sends them out in pairs.

[If I were one of these 'others', I'm not sure I would be anticipating much success. I'd probably be fretting about whether I'd have the courage to knock on someone's door and ask for a place to stay – let alone preparing to preach that the kingdom of God is near!]

And given all Jesus' warnings about what to do in case of rejection, I wouldn't be surprised if that's primarily what they're expecting: some success, but mostly a big dose of rejection.

But that isn't what happens at all.

Somehow – miraculously – these Seventy-two no-names are
surprisingly,
wildly,
nearly-unbelievably...successful.

No wonder they come back to Jesus rejoicing!

When they entered a house, they said, “Peace.” And when they stayed with a person of peace, the actual, literal peace of God came to rest on that household!

They had never healed anyone before in their lives. [Can you imagine their hesitancy (and fear!) the first time they approached a sick person and thought, “*I'm supposed to heal her?!*”] But when they reached out their (trembling) hands and said, “In the name of Jesus, be healed”...they *were* healed.

They say public speaking is people's number one fear, and here these Seventy-two were supposed to go out and preach. And probably they stuttered, and their voices wavered...but they went ahead and said, “The kingdom of God is near you.” And – would you believe it! - the people responded as if it were true. They listened. They repented. Their lives were changed.

And as for the times they were rejected (which *did* happen)...they didn't end up running away with their tails between their legs. Instead they found themselves acting like prophets! They pronounced woes like the prophets did (because, when you reject God's coming to you, that's the sad truth of it). They shook the dust off their feet, like the prophets did. And they were given the courage to say, “Still, the kingdom of God is near you.” Who would have expected it?

And you know what else these Seventy-two no-names didn't expect? They encountered opposition from the enemy. They met people who were possessed by demons. They came face-to-face with the demonic. (And Jesus had never warned them about *that*. That wasn't in the job description. [They must have been terrified.]) But when the powers of darkness rose up in rebellion against them, they were given the courage to say, “In the name of Jesus, go!” And do you know what? They went. *They*

went.

No wonder they come back to Jesus rejoicing! “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!”

That's a big deal. The forces of evil and the servants of Satan backed down before them. They submitted to a group of seventy-two no-names.

“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!”

In response, Jesus says two things that are surprising.

The first thing Jesus says underscores that this *is* a big deal. In fact, it's an even bigger deal than they realize. Jesus says, “You know, when you were out there preaching, and healing, and sharing meals with folks...I saw Satan fall like lightning.”

This is a big deal. (And, quite frankly, it's awesome!) Jesus himself has given a group of seventy-two no-names authority over demons. And they didn't even know!

They're sharing God's peace in people's homes...and they're trampling on snakes and scorpions. They're healing and preaching...and without realizing it, they're overcoming all the power of the enemy.

They're moving from town to town and facing all sorts of opposition...but nothing has *harmed* them.

The work Jesus gave them to do was a bigger deal than they even realized. Through them, God was disarming the powers of Satan. And they didn't even know.

So Jesus says, “I saw Satan fall like lightning.”

That's the first surprising thing he says. He says, “What you're doing is an even bigger deal than you realize.”

And then Jesus says the second surprising thing. He says, “In the scheme of things, what you're doing is not that big of a deal at all.”

He says, “Even so, don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you. Instead, rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

To a group of seventy-two no-names, Jesus says, “Your names are written in heaven.”

He tells them: God wants you.

God has chosen you.

God knows *you*.

God's power flows through you.

God is disarming the enemy through you.

God is advancing his kingdom through you.

God loves you.

Almighty God has written *your* names in heaven.

Jesus tells the seventy-two: "I have empowered you to big things. But at the end of the day, what matters most isn't what you do for me. What matters most is that your names are written in heaven."

And people of God, *your* names are written in heaven. Our names are written in heaven.

Those of us who are gathered here this morning are a lot like the Seventy-two. When people look back on the history of God's church, probably none of us will be mentioned by name. Sometimes we're polished, but deep down, we're rough around the edges. We're a ragtag group of underdogs. But here we are this morning, called out by Jesus. Called out by name.

And to our astonishment, somewhere along the way, many of us have had the experience of the Seventy-two, where God has made us

surprisingly,

wildly,

nearly-unbelievably successful.

That's the experience of Hope Church these days, in some ways. We're nobody special, and I know you've had your share of worry and heartache along the way...and here we are, nearly bursting at the seams! God is at work in this world through...us. (Amazing.)

And as individuals, we find ourselves overwhelmed by what God has done through us:

Through some of you, God has answered prayer miraculously.

Through others of you, God used *you* to introduce people to Jesus.

Through some of you, God has fed, and clothed, and sheltered people who've needed it.

Through others of you, God has given hope to people who had no hope.

Through you, God has been disarming the powers of the enemy. He's given *you* authority to do it, and you probably didn't even know. And Satan falls like lightning.

Even so, Jesus says to us here this morning, "Rejoice. But don't rejoice because the spirits submit to you. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Your names are written in heaven.

The fact that God works through us is a big deal.

The fact that God knows and loves us is a much, much bigger deal.

The fact that God gives us his authority over evil is really cool.

But those experiences will never be enough to sustain us.

What sustains us is: our names are written in heaven.

That's a good word to hear for those of us who are

surprisingly,

wildly,

nearly-unbelievably successful.

And for us underdogs who are
 weak,
 and disappointed,
 and sad...
 that's the gospel. That's our saving grace.

Our names are written in heaven.

Powerful experiences are wonderful.
Working well for the kingdom is good (in the fullest sense of the word).

But the thing that will carry us
 from day to day,
 through this vale of tears,
 through every disappointment and tragedy
is that our names are written in heaven.

And the God who calls us by name says, "I have engraved you on the palm of my hands. I will neither leave you nor forsake you, for you are mine."

Our names are written in heaven. And that matters for our real lives even now, here on earth.

Church,
If there is a brother or sister you need to forgive...your name – and theirs - is written in heaven.
When it seems impossible to love yourself...your name is written in heaven.
When God is blessing you and working powerfully through you...your name is written in heaven.
When you are suffering, and tired, and everything hurts...your name is written in heaven.
When the evil one accuses you and tries to hold all your sins against you...if you are in Christ, your name is written in heaven. And there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

And if there are any here this morning who feel lost or estranged from God, listen...because he may be calling *your* name, too.

So then, people of God, when you are
 surprisingly,
 wildly,
 nearly-unbelievably successful...your names are written in heaven.
And even when you're...*not*...your names are written in heaven.

Hope Christian Reformed Church, assembled here in Oak Lawn, Illinois...your name is written in heaven.
And God knows each one of you. He wants you. He loves you. And the Spirit testifies that he calls you by name.

That is reason to rejoice.

Amen?

Thanks be to God!