

**2026 TALK, 1.3.26, LUKE 9:1-6, 10:1-9 & 17-24**

**LENT SERIES: 'JESUS, THE DISCIPLES & DISCIPLE-MAKING – BUILDING THE CHURCH THROUGH SMALL GROUPS'**

**EMPTY HANDS, FULL HEARTS**

Let me tell you a story. The story of a young American guy, who started out in business - in real estate. His business was going well. What's more, around this time, he came to faith in Jesus. So, he joined a group, run by a church for people in business. They were supporting each other, both spiritually & practically. Then this guy hit a difficult time. It turned out his supposed 'business partner' had been swindling him out of a lot of money. A whole heap of money. Through this time, he was supported by the close friends he had made in this group. He decided, not surprisingly, that he was going to take his former business partner to court, to try to get back his money. So far, so sensible. He employed a lawyer. Then something else happened...

At the group they were reading through the Sermon on the Mount. They came to Jesus' words in Matt 5:40... 'If someone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well'... The more he prayed about this, the more he became convinced God was telling him to drop the legal case against his old friend & business partner. His lawyer told him he was 'crazy'. Not only was he saying 'goodbye' to rightfully reclaiming over a million dollars that had been stolen from him, he was going to have to pay off the lawyer. Big money!

Now all this could have easily ruined him. More than that, this is something that could have cast a long shadow over the rest of his life. It could have really bothered him & festered away in his mind. It could have fed a 'root of bitterness' in his heart. But here's the thing. This guy had settled this all with God. By God's grace he had been able to forgive his old friend. And he had been able to leave the future of his business with God. He was trusting God – both for his past and his future. Because he wasn't always looking over his shoulder, because he wasn't always looking ahead with a worried frown, his 'today' was always a good day. He knew God was with him.

Within a few days of having dropped the case, the lawyer contacted him again. He said, 'I haven't been able to get you & what you did, out of my mind'. And the lawyer invited him to a lunch, to meet a friend of his, who owned a big real estate business. As a result of this lunch, our brother who had done the

impossible because of Jesus, went into business with this other guy. And as a result he has made x100 times the amount he lost to his first business partner...

This is a true story, told by Andy Wood, one of the pastors of the Saddleback Church in the States. Of course, things don't always work out like this. Our young businessman would have done exactly the same, even if things hadn't turned out quite so well as they did. I'm not preaching prosperity gospel here, but the importance of being faithful & obedient to Jesus – 'come what may'...

You might begin to wonder though, what has this story got to do with Luke 9 & 10? With the 12 being sent out, then the 72 being sent out? Well, there are multiple connections. Here are just some of those connections:

Firstly, there's the lesson that Andy Wood draws from this story. He comments: 'No-one becomes the best version of themselves, by themselves'. It was only because the support of his small group that this young businessman was able to take the steps of faith & obedience that he took. Being engaged in a group with a shared passion & mission changes people for the better. That's exactly what was happening with the 12 and with the 72 in Luke 9&10.

The 2nd connection between our story and the mission of the disciples is this. Jesus said to his disciples: "Go! I am sending you out as sheep among wolves"... As Jesus demonstrated in the wilderness, there are going to be all sorts of challenges to our faith. All sorts of powers in this world which attempt to distract us from going God's way. Things, along the way, which will seek to deflect us from walking with Jesus. Which is why we need each other. This also perhaps explains why Jesus tells his disciples not to 'talk to anyone on the way'.

The 3rd connection between our first story & the story of the disciples double mission is this: The aim of **both** groups of disciples was not a closed, mutual-appreciation society, with lots of back-slapping & funny hand-shakes. This was a small group designed to reach out to other people with similar needs & challenges. This group included people who didn't believe in Jesus, but were wanting to find out about Jesus. We don't know about the other 60 disciples Jesus appointed, as well as the 12, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> mission - but I'm pretty sure that not all of those 60 believed in Jesus... We don't know this for sure. But what we do know is this: in each one, Jesus could see enormous potential. Even if they had yet to bow the knee to Jesus as their LORD, by the time they had finished this mission I'm sure many of them did... Because of what they had seen happen in the lives of those they reached out to, in the name & power of Jesus.

Why on earth didn't Jesus do all this himself? He was more than capable wasn't he? If anyone could do this, it was Jesus... But here's the thing. Not only did Jesus recognise that he, as a single human being had his own limits. More importantly, he realised that God was telling him to call others to partner him in this mission. And before I go on, we need to pause... We must let the enormity of this set it: ***Jesus chooses us to partner with him in his mission...***

There are 2 incidents which highlight Jesus' thinking here. The reasons why he launches these two missions. Firstly, some time before, Jesus is found by the people, as he prays on his own, early in the morning in a solitary place. They try to drag him back to their village, to continue teaching & healing **there**. But Jesus simply says, 'I must also go to **other** villages, for this is why I have come'... The second incident, is Jesus' initial reaction to the 1st mission of the 12. He observes: 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few'... Jesus has a growing awareness of the huge challenge facing him in sharing the good news of the Kingdom of God. How will everyone hear?

So, we can see the reason why Jesus launched these missionary teams. These twelve have had some training with Jesus beforehand. Probably a matter of a few weeks of witnessing Jesus in action. Now it's their turn. (Gulp!). He sends out the 12, so they have some experience, on their own, of ministering in the name of Jesus... Then two by two, the original disciples, with limited experience of mission in the name of Jesus, partner with another 10 followers of Jesus. Together they form 6 discipleship groups of 12 people each, so that they can, in their different 'missionary teams', visit many more towns & villages. And they do this as a 'softening up' exercise before Jesus comes...

One of the curious details here is Jesus' insistence that they take nothing with them for their missionary journeys. Their mission relies on the hospitality & generosity of those they go to share the good news with. They are meant to go with 'empty hands & full hearts'. This runs contrary to all our own instincts. If we travel anywhere, we always go with full suitcases don't we...? (Some of us have fuller suitcase than others – mentioning no names, Christine...!).

There is this instinct, deep within us, that says we need to be individually 'full equipped'. We need to be 'toggled up'. We need to have to hand all the 'tools of the trade'... We have this super-hero fixation, about all the particular powers we need for the job. But Jesus strips these away from his disciples. He actually says, 'Take NOTHING'... There are some curiosities about the things he lists here for them NOT to take... 'no staff'... (no potential weapons), 'no bag, no

bread, no money' (nothing to sustain you & nothing of any value)... 'no extra shirt'...! (no change of clothes! – this is gonna be a sweaty, smelly mission!)... The 2<sup>nd</sup> list is shorter, but also slightly curious: 'no purse, no bag, no SANDALS!... Like St Francis & the early Franciscan friars... This is a mission of poverty before it becomes a mission of power... This is a mission which can be summed up in a single phrase: **'Take nothing, leave peace'...** (x2) A mission of 'nothingness', but a mission which leaves peace... And Jesus uses the word 'nothing' in another way here. He assures his followers: **'Nothing will harm u'...**

Are we ready for a 'mission of nothingness'?... I can think of at least two reasons why we need to form small groups, here at Carey: for mission & for Christian formation. These small groups would be for our own good & for the good of those beyond the church... Make sense?... I wonder. How many of us here are trying to follow Jesus, on our own, in our own strength? (Hands up... ). We feel that individually we need to be fully equipped, eg. with the armour of God in Eph 6... But we forget is this: Paul is NOT imagining 1 individual. No. He is seeing one person as part of a large army. Yes, we each need God's armour. ***But only together can we make a stand in this world. We need each other as much as we need the armour of God...***

So, finally ! You may be thinking – 'What there's more !?... Yes, something else for us to think about... Three things, very briefly, for us to reflect on this Lent...

1) Are you praying? Before sending out the 72, Jesus declares: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few... Ask the LORD of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest field"... Doesn't seem very hopeful. The harvest is huge. The workers are few... But who are we praying to this Lent? ... Who else but the 'LORD of the harvest...'. God knows what He is doing, even if we don't!

2) Have we received power? Before they were sent out, as they prayed together, Jesus gave his followers power... Power to proclaim good news. Power to declare peace & blessing. Power to pray with people for healing. Power to bring hope to the hopeless. A remarkable, beyond-human ability to bring the multiple blessings of the Kingdom of God, to earth. Alleluia!

3) We too can know the joy of the LORD, by together sharing the good news with others in the name of Jesus. There's lots of joy in Luke 9&10. Don't forget: 'Rejoice in the LORD'... 'The joy of the LORD is our strength...' Alleluia!

***It's beyond me to grow this church. But by God's grace can do this together. God is faithful. 'God's word will achieve the purpose for which it was sent.'***

