**A Community of Hospitality. July 3 2022 Luke 10:1-12, 16-20.**

Back in 2004 my ten and eleven year old sons and I travelled to England. We had arranged our trip through a travel agent who personally knew the woman whom we would stay with in London. When we arrived it became immediately obvious that she was not at all keen on having two young boys in her home, and she felt we had far too much luggage. We all felt so uncomfortable, there was no “warm welcome” just a tense environment after our long flight from the West coast of America.

Hospitality is a strong theme is Scripture. There were high expectations that the Israelites would treat not only their own families but also widows, orphans and aliens with kindness, respect and consistent generosity. The author of the letter to the Hebrews reminds them “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Hospitality is at the heart of the mission that Jesus gives to these 72 followers. These followers seem to symbolise the nations in their known world.[[2]](#footnote-2) So this mission may be seen as a forerunner to their mission after Jesus’ resurrection, when they take this message throughout the world.[[3]](#footnote-3) These followers of Jesus are to be dependent on the hospitality of the communities they visit, and they are to bring what they have to offer to these households with care, respect, integrity and humility.

The instructions Jesus gave them continue to point to principles that can guide us even in our very different context and era of history.

**As you go remember:**

They were encouraged to **recognise God is at work,** it is God who produces theharvest, and that harvest is described as “plentiful”. They are joining with God in the work of God in the world. This is significant work, the work which Jesus has been doing and in which they now share. The harvest

image would remind them of the element of urgency in their work, it is not to be taken lightly.

Recognising that God is at work they are encouraged to pray, to “ask the Lord” to send more people who can help in this work. It is God’s work, they weren’t encouraged to go and round up some more helpers, these need to be people whom God has prepared to join in this work. It reminds us of the importance of prayer in anything that the church engages in. It is easy for us to begin thinking is our work, or our group, when the work of the church is always God’s work.

The significance of their work requires their undivided attention. They cannot afford to get distracted or delayed so they are told to “greet no one on the road”. The greetings in this culture were often very prolonged, so Jesus minimising this just to the greeting of “peace” or shalom”, was quite counter cultural. Cultural traditions were not to distract them from their task.

They were to take nothing extra with them reinforcing the sense of urgency and the need to be focused on the task rather than their possessions. Travelling in this way made them vulnerable. Usual symbols of status were not on display. They would be deeply dependent on their hosts. They would need to trust that God would provide them with hospitality. This reinforces the “importance of faith in the journey of vital discipleship”.[[4]](#footnote-4)

By travelling in pairs these disciples honoured the Mosaic law which required the testimony of two people to be credible.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Travelling and working with a partner also provided a safeguard for them in maintaining their honesty and integrity throughout the mission and in their reports afterwards.

**Whilst there remember:**

These disciples were to stay in one home and to eat what they were given by those offering them hospitality. They weren’t to impose their cultural preferences on others, and they were to be satisfied with whatever the host provided.They were to show respect and honour to their hosts, the way they lived would be as important as their words and actions. This encouraged their hosts to set the agenda for their time in their home. It’s interesting that very little said about what the disciples were to do when they got to these towns, except for the very detailed instructions regarding how they live with their host. Hospitality, respect and humility characterise these encounters. These values remain powerful and most appropriate in our connections with our broader community. They enable the building and growth of community.

These disciples were given power to “cure the sick” in doing so they were caring for very practical, physical needs of the people, and they were reminded to keep pointing people to the work that God was doing. These communities were grasping something of what God was doing through their interactions with these followers of Jesus.

These disciples were also told to offer a blessing of peace indiscriminately to each household they encountered. This blessing showed that they cared about them, it was an implicit prayer for the peace and wellbeing of the household, an invitation to share in the wholeness that Jesus gives. They just needed to accept it.

**There will be difficulties but persevere**

Jesus never minimised the hard realities of choosing to follow him. The intentional purpose of God was driving Jesus to Jerusalem, to suffering and death, to deal with the power of evil, and to bring true freedom and salvation to all who will accept it. There was a heightened vulnerability for the disciples, no longer could acceptance be expected. The images Jesus uses evoke the reality of the dangers that may await them. Defenceless, like lambs before wolves, confronted by dangers like facing a serpent and encountering obstacles to their calling like scorpions. These images were familiar metaphors to these people.

They are encouraged to realise that some will reject them, but they are not to be overwhelmed by this. Rather they should acknowledge it and move on. The reaction to their message doesn’t compromise its truth.[[6]](#footnote-6) God’s kingdom was coming close to these communities, if they rejected these messengers they were effectively rejecting the message and the One behind the message.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**There is great cause for rejoicing**

The dramatic experiences the disciples had caused them to rejoice at what they had been a part of, but Jesus refocuses their joy instead on the wonder that God had reached out and accepted them.

Dramatic experiences can capture our attention but the amazing consistent love and grace of God deserve our attention, our thanks and praise.

**So how do we understand our mission today?**

What has God called us to do? What are we passionate about? In what ways are we connecting with our broader community?

When we identify our place in the work of God in our world, it would be wise to examine how we are approaching this work. Are we recognising it is God’s work, not merely ours?

Are we praying about it? Are we praying for the people we connect with to be blessed?

Are we staying focused? Are we making ourselves vulnerable and relying on God? Are we engaged in this work with openness? Are we allowing those we connect with to set the agenda?

Are we offering hospitality, respect and humility? Are we offering our service indiscriminately to all?

Are we ready to deal with some people rejecting us? Are we ready for a challenging path?

Are we thankful for our experiences of the amazing love and grace of God which undergirds all we do and are? The context and therefore the forms of mission are very different today, however these principles are still valuable.

1. Hebrews 13:2 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the Septuagint in Genesis 10 the number of the nations is given as 72. Joel Green, The Gospel of Luke, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997) 412 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Matthew 28:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Joel Green, The Gospel of Luke, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997) 359 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. R. Alan Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck et al (Eds) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 219 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, 220 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2004) 122 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)