

14th Sunday – Luke 10:1-12, 17-18

Luke is unique in recording a mission of the 72 in addition to a mission of the Twelve during the lifetime of Jesus. Possibly, he is reminding the reader of the 70 elders who assisted Moses. Certainly, he is looking forward to pairs like Paul and Barnabas in Acts who worked for the gospel but who did not belong to the original Twelve. The harvest was too great to be reaped by such a small group. Legend has it that Luke himself was one of the 72.

The conditions for this mission were ***demanding***. Their ***resources were minimal*** and their task ***urgent***. It was ***dangerous*** too. They were like sheep among wolves. They were given ***no guarantee of success***. Sometimes they would be welcomed, sometimes not. But their message was not their own. Like Jesus, they were to preach the kingdom of God. They would learn that "through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God." At the Last Supper, Jesus relaxed his prohibition of purse and bag for the journey. Now the mission was not confined to Palestine but was directed to the ends of the earth.

Despite all, their mission was successful and they returned full of joy. Correctly, they attributed their success not to their own efforts but to the "name" of Jesus. They reported to him. Jesus knew that events on earth had repercussions in heaven. He reminded them that their task was not only against the powers of this world, but against the powers of evil in high places. Their earthly success had driven Satan's power from heaven and their labors for the gospel had ensured that their own names were written in the heavenly books. They should rejoice because they were citizens of the New Jerusalem in heaven.

Unfortunately, the times are different now than in the time of the apostles. The present generation call themselves as "Nones," that is, non-religious. Many had parents that were not practicing their religion because they were the ***Age of Aquarius***. Rather than Christians going out into a pagan world, now we have a generation of pagans that see religion as obsolete with some even into magic and crystals!

A recent survey listed many factors, here are those at the top of the list:

-Even though Islam were the perpetrators of 9/11, more people in the US came to associate ***orthodoxy of all kinds with zealotry and violence***. They see religion not only as violent but as ***a source of evil***, and it gets people to be ***extremists***.

-**Scandals** among clergy is another, and the **politicization** of evangelical Christianity also drove people to abandon religious institutions. The **digital revolution** transformed society, weakening social structures, altering the nature of our relationships and turning the fissures already forming within many denominations into outright fractures.

-Increasingly, people are having **fewer children** or no children, and it's being delayed until their 30's. And again, if religion is obsolete, why would you want to socialize your kid into that? Besides, your kid is part of **a traveling soccer team**, and you can't always be at church activities, they get crowded out by all these other demands and activities.

Besides the above factors that "Nones" listed, add to that their reasons for leaving Childhood religion as Teenager or Adults. They listed that Religion is not about institution but a **personal matter**, or **Life obligations** got in the way, besides religious are **hypocrites**, institutions are **corrupt and greedy**, and are **anti-LGBTQ**, or they **seek power** and are **manipulative**, etc.

I wonder how the apostles would fare in today's society. We are the early Christians replacements now. Still, Jesus would remind us the one thing that is the same is that the message is not our own. We preach the Kingdom of God whose main message is **love**, that is, love of God and love of neighbor.

As a true Faith Community should live our faith and love where all are welcome. Also mentioned in the survey is a small minority of people who have been through the party culture and they say, *"You know what? This is empty. I don't want to live like this."* Those who eventually reach that point come back to their faith community, but not all.

The other stark reality is that our cell phones cannot love us back. And besides, God doesn't use cell phones, I've tried, and besides the line is always busy. The Nones put filters in place so that anyone they befriend is just like them. The problem is, we work in a real world with real people. Now there is a growing danger of Artificial Intelligence more convincingly telling us what we want to hear.

The Body of Christ is only as real as we as individuals live it, especially with each other in our lives through our faith and love. There is no more powerful witness to Christ than the witness of our Faith Community. "Look how they love one another!"