

Stretching Toward Sunday

*Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings*

July 3, 2016
Proper 9C / Ordinary 14C / Pentecost +7

The readings this week:
• 2 Kings 5:1-14 • Psalm 30
• Galatians 6:(1-6), 7-16 • Luke 10:1-11, 16-20



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

"Go!"

One of the fascinating things about the Jesus story is how far and how fast it spread. The book of Acts begins in Jerusalem and ends 1500 miles to the west in Rome. The wild fire also burned to the east. By the year 635 believers confessed Jesus as Lord in China. A hundred years after that, Syrian believers had spread the gospel to Baghdad, Tibet and India. The apostle Paul traveled 10,000 miles proclaiming the good news of God's love.

How did this happen? Luke's gospel for this week gives us some clues.

Jesus traveled from village to village proclaiming the good news of God: "The time has come! The kingdom of God is at hand. Follow me." He preached to the poor and healed the sick. This urgent message invited a radical response: "Repent and believe the good news." And that's what many people did. They made a break with business as usual and followed Jesus.

When Jesus saw Peter and Andrew fishing, he invited them, "Come, follow me." The gospels dramatize their response: "At once they left their nets and followed him."

When Jesus later saw James and John fishing with their father Zebedee, the call and response were the same: "They immediately left the boat and their father and followed him." Likewise for the tax collector Levi: "He left everything and followed Jesus."

In addition to these individual callings, Jesus appointed twelve followers as apostles — literally, "sent ones." Their collective response mirrors these individual calls. Speaking for the twelve apostles, Peter said to Jesus, "We have left everything to follow you!"

A few pages later, the movement expands. In this week's gospel, Luke writes that "the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go."

Luke never names these people, and we never hear of them again. Since this is the only mention of them, we have no idea where they went, what they did, or what happened to them. Like many others before them, they too left families and homes to spread the message of Jesus about the kingdom of God.

Who financed this fledgling cadre of gospel witnesses? Who underwrote these "sent ones" who had left their livelihoods and deserted family businesses? Luke is clear. Prominent women who had left their husbands and families financed and traveled with the itinerating evangelists.

Luke writes: "Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many other women. These women were helping to support them out of their own means" (Luke 8:1-3).

They must have been quite a sight — newly appointed envoys with no formal training, an advance logistics team for Jesus, and "many" women supporters. They were the first of those first believers in Acts 4:34 who sold their lands and houses to support the Jesus movement.

Although the larger group of seventy-two "sent ones" is clouded in historical obscurity, speculation about their identity has been impossible to resist. Were they formal apostles or merely disciples? The Orthodox prefer the former and more technical term. Western Christians prefer the informal designation "disciples." Luke simply says that Jesus sent out "seventy-two others."

Many names in the lists are people mentioned in the New Testament. Some of the lists include several women among the seventy-two. That's a tantalizing historical tidbit if these women emissaries were "apostles" and not mere "disciples." Whoever these people were, they model for us the radical response to the urgent announcement of Jesus.

"Go!" says Jesus in Luke 10:3. "The harvest is plentiful in a hurting world. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

If you wonder where to start or what to do, consider the epistle for this week: "Bear one another's burdens. Do good to all people." That's the meaning and message of Jesus. It's what he sends us out to be and to do. Right where we are.

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [2 Kings 5:1-14](#)

When you are in physical need, what kinds of responses or activities from people communicate to you that someone cares? What are ways that people reached out to Naaman throughout this passage? How would you describe Naaman and the servant girl? Why was Naaman angry at Elisha? What was Naaman's response when he was cured? When have you been upset because of the way God chose to work when you or someone else was in need? We have considered the benefits to Naaman of the help people gave him. What benefits do you think came to those who helped? What benefits do you receive from seeing others helped? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 30](#)

Imagine that you have turned off the radio that is blaring away inside you. Sit for a while in the quiet. You may find that there are protests inside. What are your thoughts and impressions? No one knows for sure what the problem was, but from the words "depths," "healed," "enemies," "grave" and "pit" what possible dangers may David have been facing? List the range of emotions that is described. What insight into life does David gain by acknowledging that painful as well as pleasurable experiences come from God? How do verses 6-7 describe David's sense of dependence on God? What reasons does David present to God in favor of his deliverance? How would you describe David's relationship with God? Difficult circumstances can cause us to reflect on the character of God. How have the circumstances of your life affected your relationship with God? Picture the Lord with you through the ups and downs of your life. How does it help you to know God is with you? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

*accepting jesus
harsh words of challenge
unreserved generosity
grieving in the garden.
accepting jesus
accepting those who love jesus
auburn, blond and black
scrambling and comfortable
zealous and thoughtful.
accepting jesus
accepting those who love jesus
accepting the god whom jesus loved
passion
power
presence.*

let us so love.

~ Katheryn Hawker, [Outside the Box](#)



Prayer Reflection: [Naaman's Story](#) (inspired by [2 Kings 5: 1-14](#))

*a little girl
an army commander
a religious zealot
for one brief moment
difference suspended
doubt superseded
ordinary water
simple ritual
extraordinary presence
May we have the courage of the child
to reach out to even the powerful.
May we have the wisdom of Naaman
to ask for help when we are lost.
May we have the faithfulness of Elisha
to love outside the lines.*

~ Katherine Hawker, [Liturgies Outside](#)

3rd Reading: [Galatians 6:\(1-6\), 7-16](#)

This is a passage about relationships. Who are you having difficulty loving right now? What guidelines does Paul offer for dealing with a person who is "caught in a sin," and why is each important? How does the law of Christ differ from the kind of law-keeping urged by Paul's opponents? The sins or burdens of others can lead us to feel superior. How can proper methods of self-examination correct this attitude? What do verses 12-13 reveal about the motives of Paul's opponents? How will boasting in the cross affect our desire for the world's approval? Why does the new creation have value in contrast to the worthlessness of circumcision or uncircumcision? What burdens are people you know carrying? What are some ways you can help a friend carry these? Paul bore on his body the marks of Jesus (the evidence of faithful service). What are the "marks of Jesus" in your life? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

4th Reading: [Luke 10:1-11, 16-20](#)

What has been costly for you in following Jesus? How is the mission of the seventy-two in Luke 10:1-16 different from the mission of the Twelve in 9:1-6? Verses 17-24 record a post-mission report and evaluation. Of course celebration is in order! For Jesus the success of the seventy-two is a preview of the ultimate overthrow of Satan. But as one of them, how would you have felt on hearing Jesus' words in verse 20? Jesus' every instruction reveals a deep sense of urgency. How do we develop an urgency for mission and evangelism? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)