

Pastor's Message – 7/3/22
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

It has been a long time since a member of the Gideons preached at a Church that I serve. I confess that, while I admired their commitment to spreading Bibles, I was never very impressed with the preaching skills of the Gideons who came.

It has been a long time since a Jehovah's Witness knocked on my door. Those visits I appreciated because we could talk about, discuss, and even debate the meaning and interpretations of Bible passages. If you don't know the Bible well, don't try that. They know it better.

The passage that we have from the gospel of Luke today can be confusing because many of us have had that knock on the door or have listened to a Gideon preach. Who is this passage for: only the Gideons? Only Jehovah's Witnesses?

They have a particular message to present, a particular product to sell. Have you ever heard of influencers? I've seen some videos on YouTube about people called "influencers" who shape modern culture with their opinions, clothing choices, etc. Companies will often use "influencers" to sell their products.

Influencer marketing relies on the expertise, reach and notoriety of a particular influencer — not necessarily, or even usually, a celebrity — and on how that person engages with a particular demographic. The right message, coupled with the right influencer and the right people, can make all the difference. Recently, as college athletes have been allowed to receive compensation as influencers, I've seen some television ads featuring a football player, who I think plays for the Wisconsin Badgers, selling various products. I don't buy it; what does he really know about the products he's hawking? I suppose some people are influenced by celebrity endorsements.

The average American is exposed to somewhere between 4,000 and 10,000 advertisements every day. With all that ad clutter, how does a seller get the message through? Influencer marketing. It's not about celebs. It's about real people who have clout with other people. When Jesus was looking to spread the word about the kingdom of God, he didn't post an ad — he sent out 70 influencers,

So, what exactly were these influencers peddling?

Peace. Jesus told them that the first thing they were to offer potential buyers was "peace" (v. 5). The kingdom of God wasn't just a new name for the old Jewish hope that God would come as a powerful Messiah to expel Israel's gentile Roman enemies by force.

For Jesus, the kingdom of God was a comprehensive package of world-changing ideas, actions and events designed for Jews and Gentiles alike. The message Jesus was endorsing via his influencers thus contained both a message of hope and a warning. The way forward was peace, but refusal to buy into the peace Jesus was offering meant doom. That's why the peace these influencers were to offer was conditional on the recipients' willingness to accept it (v. 6). If peace wasn't going to be received, it would be returned to the influencers to be offered to someone else.

When Jesus was looking to spread the word about the kingdom of God, he didn't post an ad — he sent out 70 influencers. He had only 12 disciples, so he must have hired a few more. Could I get 70 members in his church to volunteer to go out on a mission for the Lord? I'm afraid I'd be lucky to get 12 -- unless the 12 were already members of the church council. Jesus sent out 70 influencers and he's still doing it today!

So, who are the influencers of today?

I have a quiz for you today:

Name the 5 wealthiest people in the world.

Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.

Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.

Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.

Name the last half-dozen Academy Award winners for Best Actor.

How did you do? The point is, none of us remember the headliners of yesterday. These are no second-rate achievers — they're the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Now here's another quiz?

Bring to mind three teachers who aided your journey through school.

Bring to mind three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.

Name five people who have made you feel appreciated and special.

Name five people who you enjoy spending time with.

Name a half-dozen heroes whose stories have inspired you.

The lesson? The people who make a difference in your life aren't the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They're the ones who take the time to care.

You are not one of the original twelve or one of the original seventy, but you have a message to take to those around you and to those who you rub shoulders with. "What are the basic, essential, rock-bottom things that we as followers of Jesus today need to know and share?" Maybe we should start by asking the youngest children among us, and they'll probably answer, "Jesus loves me, this I

know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.”

What other things will people answer? Maybe:

"For God so loved the world" (John 3:16).

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

Older people, who've had many years to experience the Lord's tender mercy and grace, may answer, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20) or "Do not worry about anything" (Philippians 4:6).

Spreading those messages is not always easy. As it was for the 70 who Jesus sent, so it is for us. There is a cost to living in the kingdom. It can sometimes be uncomfortable. But there are ways to ease into the idea of taking just one step further into Jesus' concept of influencer marketing. Here are some:

- Start by identifying your natural circles of relational influence: work, family, neighbors, etc.
- Pray for the deepening of connections with nonbelievers in those circles.
- As a relationship deepens, pray for that person's life needs and for his or her salvation.
- Start looking for ways to tangibly serve and care for them.
- Ask God to build their spiritual curiosity and give you opportunities for spiritual conversations.
- Talk about your experiences in following God — the good and the bad.
- Let people know that if they ever want to discuss spiritual things, you would love to do so.

If the harvest is plentiful, our job is simply to be available to labor and to risk our personal comfort on behalf of people who don't yet know God. That is all Jesus asked of the 70 and all Jesus asks of us.

There is good news for us: the kingdom of God is already among us, and our success comes not from our accomplishments, or our status, or our job titles and degrees. Our humility, and our attentiveness to God's call, opens doors that our own strength will not. Our humility, hard-won and undesired as it may be, also allows us the grace of seeing God at work and calls us to share in it.

This is a big weekend in America. It is Fourth of July weekend and many people's attention is focused, not on church and faith, but on nation and

patriotism. There are issues that we face on a daily basis in the course of our lives, but there are also issues that we face as a nation, and as citizens of this nation, are our responsibility to influence as well.

Consider for a moment your IQ -- your global IQ?

Try the following three questions:

1. Which city is predicted to be the world's largest city in 20 years?
 - a. Mexico City
 - b. Mumbai
 - c. Tokyo

2. Which world religion is atheistic, at least in its earliest form?
 - a. Buddhism
 - b. Hinduism
 - c. Islam
 - d. Christianity

3. Which of the following car companies sells the largest number of automobiles worldwide?
 - a. Toyota
 - b. Ford
 - c. General Motors
 - d. Volkswagen

(Answers: 1. Tokyo; 2. Buddhism; 3. Toyota)

We do not live in a bubble. We are part of a global community and, a global Church, I might add. We cannot be isolationist. We are “the 70” of today.

Way back on July 5, 1852, Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave, gave a speech at a meeting sponsored by the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society. Entitled “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” it is still relevant to us today.

Here is an excerpt:

“... a religion which favors the rich against the poor; which exalts the proud above the humble; which divides mankind into two classes, tyrants and slaves; which says to the man in chains, stay there, and to the oppressor, oppress on; it is a religion which may be professed and enjoyed by all the robbers and enslavers of mankind; it makes God a respecter of persons, denies his fatherhood of the race, and tramples in the dust the great truth of the brotherhood of man...”

Jesus sent out 70 to be influencers to the surrounding countryside. Followers of Jesus are still sent to be influencers: to those around us and to the world itself.