

Luke 10:1-20

Last week in Texas, lawmakers held a special session for the purpose of acting on a bill to severely restrict abortions. Citizens in favor of the bill gathered and sang, "Amazing Grace." Protestors of the bill also gathered, and as Amazing Grace was being sung, they yelled, "Hail, Satan!" over and over. I also heard it mentioned that some protested that Mary, the mother of Jesus, should have had an abortion.

I begin with this story not to remind you that Satan is alive and well, for you are already aware of that, but as a backdrop for today's text in Luke 10. Jesus sent out 72 disciples. Their mission was clear. They went out with the good news of the kingdom of God in order to oppose the works of the devil. They went out as lambs in the midst of wolves, for Satan viciously attacks those who resist him. Was their mission a success? It depends on who you ask. By today's standards for growing churches, they were failures, for the number of those who followed Jesus did not pick up, but remained in a state of decline. But if you had asked the 72, they would have shared a different response. They returned with joy and excitement as they told Jesus, "*Even the demons are subject to us in Your name!*"

When Texas lawmakers passed that bill last Wednesday restricting the practice of abortions, Satan was not pleased, for he was a murderer from the beginning, and even today incites murder outside of, and inside of, the womb. But even more than being a murderer, he is a soul-murderer. Surely what angers him most when babies are not aborted, is that their parents may have them baptized and taught the Christian Faith. But angry as he may be, he is conquered again and again when God's work is done.

The 72 disciples did God's work by healing the sick, casting out demons, and preaching the kingdom of God. Not all listened. Not all welcomed them. So they simply shook off their dust at them and moved on. But some listened. Some believed. Some welcomed the good news they brought. And when they told this to Jesus, He said, "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*"

You cannot see the lightning outside this morning, but trust me, it's there. Not thunder and lightning...just lightning. Satan is falling right now like lightning from heaven. We cannot see it, but Jesus does. The 72 could not see it, but Jesus did. Satan is falling like lightning from heaven because God's work is being done here among you. You who are spiritually sick are being healed. You who are in the devil's grasp are being delivered. The good news of the kingdom of God is being preached to you, and Satan is angry--more angry than you and I could ever realize. But nevertheless, he is falling; he is falling like lightning from heaven.

Jesus did not appoint 72 disciples to come here to Augusta and preach to you. But He did call your pastor. And Jesus' words to the 72 are just as true about His pastors who preach His Word of Truth today..."*The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me.*" It's not Pastor Bell doing God's work here at Christ Lutheran Church, it's Jesus. It's not Pastor Bell preaching to you, it's Jesus. It would have little meaning for you if a mere man in a white robe were to forgive your sins. But it's not me forgiving you. Jesus forgives you through the words that I speak.

When the 72 went out to preach, they were to teach and proclaim only the words Jesus put into their mouths. And this is just as important today--that your pastor, that all pastors preach and teach only the truth of God's Word. The fact that there are so many churches today that differ greatly in what they preach and teach is a sad testimony that not all have done this. Not all have preached and taught only God's Word in truth. How easy it would be for us to know that God's pastors are true if we could see

Satan falling like lightning from heaven when they preached. There would be little doubt, wouldn't there, if you could see lightning flashes accompanying the sermon coming from the pulpit? But Jesus does not permit us to see this, nor did He permit the 72 to see it. Instead, Jesus tells them and us what is even more important than seeing Satan falling like lightning. "*Do not rejoice in (that),*" He says, "*but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*" The simple, yet profound truth He is telling them by these words is this--"Rejoice not in what you can do, but rejoice in what has been, and is being done, for you."

A few minutes ago we confessed the Christian Faith together. And when you stop to really look at the Creed, you can see very clearly that everything in it is what God has done and is doing for us. We're in there, but not as actors. We are recipients...recipients of God's work. Our faith--the Christian Faith--has nothing to do with what we can do for God, for our neighbor, for our church. We believe, teach, and confess what God has done for us. The 72 were excited. Demons were fleeing when they spoke Jesus' name. Our Lord did not chastise them for their excitement. He simply pointed them to the greater work. Not their works against the devil, but Jesus' work on the cross.

Friend, your name is written in heaven not because of what you have done for Jesus, but because of what Jesus has done for you. He died for you. He baptized you. He preaches to you. He catechizes you. He forgives your sins. He gives you His body and blood at His altar. He gives you faith and keeps you in the faith. So why do we boast? Why are we proud of ourselves? Why do we act like the church would fall apart if we weren't there to keep it going? Jesus doesn't need any of us to do His work here among us. And yet, He uses all of us.

The 72 did not come to Jesus. He called them. He appointed them. Everyone of you has work to do--God's work. I know that some are slackers, and some of you are burnt out. But remember, when God's work is done--Jesus doing it through us--Satan falls like lightning. We can't all be preachers, or teachers. We can't all play the organ or sing in the choir. We can't all be ushers, or greeters. We can't all serve on boards and committees. But we can all come to church and receive God's gifts. We can all be in His Word regularly. We can all pray. We can all be Christ to our families and friends. We can all look for ways to serve. Do you suppose the 72 disciples go burnt out? Do you suppose some of them worked harder than others did? And yet, they all were excited. They all were useful to Jesus. In all of them, and through all of them, He was the one at work.

And that is true here as well. Not one of us-- not one--is going to get our name written in heaven by working and serving the Lord. We work for Jesus out of love. We serve in response to His love for us. He is the one who moves us to action. He is the one working in us and through us. And He does not base His mercy upon how well you have worked for Him. He forgives you--all of you--not because of anything that we have done for Him, but because He laid down His life for you on a cross. And isn't that reason to serve? Isn't that reason to stop slacking, and to stop complaining when others do nothing?

Jesus sent out 72 disciples. We have about 72 disciples here who are pretty faithful...maybe more, maybe less. But it's not about numbers. It's not about how many of us are working for Jesus. It's the fact that Jesus is here for you. He is the one who is at work. Satan is falling because of Him. Your name is written in heaven because of Him. And so you, too, can rejoice as you carry out the work of the Lord. Amen.