

# *Sent Out with Nothing?*

Luke 9: 1–6; 10, 11

1 Corinthians 9: 9–23

*by Rev. Shannon Bell*

Imagine paying money to get good tickets to see your favourite team play a sport. Or maybe you are at your grandchild's soccer game ready to cheer for the team. The game is ready to begin. The teams are on the sidelines in their colourful uniforms and the referees are in place. Your team huddles around the coach to get their instructions and encouragement for the game. The whistle blows and your team continues to gather in their huddle. They don't want to go out and play. They are enjoying listening to the coach. Some of the players are afraid of getting hurt. Others don't feel like running hard today. There are a few team members who are uncomfortable filling new positions. Until your team is ready to move out of their huddle and get out on the field, there will be no game to cheer for.

The body of Christ is like a sports team. At times of worship or Bible study or fellowship, the church is in its huddle. Huddles are good some of the time, but the majority of the game is on the field, court or rink. The game is played outside the huddle. In Luke 9, Jesus had huddle time with his team and then sent them out onto the field to truly fulfill their purpose. Their purpose was a continuation of his.

Jesus sent his disciples out into the field—the mission field. Not everyone was invited into this initial huddle, instead Jesus gave his friends what they needed to enter into the lives and realities of people in towns and villages through the whole region. This going out is what defines mission. Although some see ministry as an all-encompassing word to describe all work and service done to glorify God, in the Cariboo House Churches a distinction is made between **ministry** and **mission**.

- **Ministry** is what the church does to build up the body of Christ for those in the pews—those things that encourage and challenge us, and help us grow in our faith and walk with Jesus. Bible study, worship, preaching, church school, visitation, fellowship groups and events are all important ways in which people experience growth in their faith. These types of ministries happen in the huddle.

- **Mission** is the way we spend ourselves for the sake of loving those outside the church. We do this without the goal of gaining any direct benefits to the body of Christ such as financial or church growth. These things may eventually come about, but they are not our first motivation in mission. Mission is going-out to bring healing and the kingdom of God to a hurting world. Mission happens on the playing field as we spread out and take our positions as a team.

Jesus doesn't want us to stay in our holy huddles in the church. He sends us out just like those first followers. Although God tells us to bring nothing in Luke 9, verse 3, he doesn't send us out empty handed. God sent his disciples with power and authority. Power is the *ability* to do something. Authority is the *right* to exercise that power. He gave them the power and authority to drive out all demons and heal diseases. That is pretty amazing! Jesus has power over all spiritual and physical things. Through him we can be set free from the spiritual and physical things that bind us up and keep us from living fully and in freedom. Our faith in God and love of Jesus gives us the same power and authority. Jesus sends us out to see people set free and healed. Who are the people in your community who live in oppression from either spiritual or physical forces? They are waiting for us to get out of the huddle and bring the power of Jesus into their lives.

There were two parts to the mission of the early disciples. They brought healing to people on a spiritual and physical level, but they also proclaimed the kingdom of God. They were given the great privilege of telling others what a fantastic plan God has for the world and for every human being. The world around us is in need of good news. It is too good to keep the game plan within the huddle. It is meant to be taken to the world outside the church. In a world of injustice, we proclaim the justice of God. In a world of violence and oppression, we proclaim freedom and peaceful relationships. In a world of consumerism, greed and poverty, we proclaim a kingdom where everyone has what they need from the hand of a loving God. In a world of pain, anger, shame and grief, we proclaim a love that covers and heals all.

Mission requires us to go out, to leave the huddle. Jesus' instructions to the disciples are still the best guidelines for how to do mission today. Notice that he sent them out two by two. No lone ranger missionaries here. Like all we do as the body of Christ, it is done in partnership and community. This provides us with support and encouragement as well as accountability.

When the disciples were sent out, they were not to take much with them. “*Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic.*” (verse 3) This is a verse that we can often overlook or pass over as it seems so impractical in today’s world of insurance, financial portfolios and retirement planning. However, the real essence of the instruction put the disciples in a position of vulnerability. They were vulnerable to those with whom they were sharing God’s love. By not having the means to provide for themselves, they were not only trusting in God’s provision, but also becoming dependent upon the people to whom they were sent to share the Good News. Jesus’ friends were not to take any money or food for themselves. If they were to eat, it would be at the gracious invitation of the people of the village they were entering. They were not to take extra clothing or a staff, but trust that all their needs would be taken care of. They were also not to take a bag. Scholars believe this referred to the bag that followers of some other religions of the time would carry with them for the purpose of begging. Jesus did not want his disciples to be out begging for their needs. They were to live in trust and know that God would provide through the hospitality of local hosts. They were to stay at the first place that welcomed them without searching around for something better. Their focus was to be on what they had to share rather than on their own needs.

This is a key element in how we approach mission. Too often we think that we have to have everything lined up and figured out before we can step out. We want to know that our ducks are in a row and we are in a position of security, that our financial needs will be met for some time to come. However, the disciples were sent out in a position of insecurity and dependence. We want to do mission projects knowing that we have control or power over our situations, whereas Jesus sends us in vulnerable.

When The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) reaches out to the First Nations people of Canada we need to be vulnerable. We have to rely on their welcome and provisions. In Ndazkoh, BC, in the Cariboo, it means living in the community and being involved in every aspect of village life. We witness and minister by teaching the children the stories of Jesus in their own spaces and using the tools of Dakelh language and culture; by playing the drum in worship and passing a talking stick in prayer; and by reading the Scriptures in Dakelh at funerals and walking through times of grief and struggle with band members. All of these proclaim the kingdom in this community. Facing the very real experiences of evil spirits and ghosts along with praying for the sick shows the power of God in

healing ways. In Saskatoon, through the Saskatoon Native Circle, God's love is witnessed by sharing soup and sandwiches in a downtown storefront; by following the traditions of the First Nation peoples of the Prairies while counseling people in the area of addiction, depression and loss; by listening to the stories and trials of local residents; and by offering a safe circle to help learn culturally appropriate life skills. Both these ministries put their trust in God. They leave their huddles when they open their doors, travel by car or plane, and a make themselves available to whomever and whatever is needed. They have been sent vulnerable. Take the opportunity to learn more about all of the First Nations ministries in our church and how we seek to place ourselves in respectful dependence upon the communities God calls us to.

When the PCC first sought to reach out to the First Nations people of Canada, they took the Colonial approach to mission. It was a position of power. Rather than entering into the First Nations community and putting themselves in a place of vulnerability and trusting that God would lead them, the church instead used the comfortable and secure approach government policy offered. They used their position of power to take the children to schools where the church controlled the setting. The children were stripped of their languages, cultures, family support systems and relationships. Unfortunately, the situation of power resulted in some abuse. In taking this approach, the church rejected the hospitality that the First Nations communities had to offer. This is the opposite of what Jesus did with the disciples. They were reliant on the welcome and hospitality of those with whom they were going to share God's love. Think of how differently things would have turned out had the church instead gone into First Nations communities to live among them, relying on their welcome and provision, learning their cultures and languages in order to demonstrate God's love and power.

We are Jesus' disciples today. He continues to send us out of the huddle of the church to bring his kingdom to the world. Like those first disciples, we need to find ways to go out that allows us to enter into the reality and space of the people we are called to serve in an attitude of dependence and vulnerability. Our real power comes in the authority and power given to us by Jesus. To whom are you called to go out? On whom does God want you to spend yourselves for the sake of the gospel? Could it be seniors? Then go to where they are and build a community of love and faith. In 100 Mile House, BC, Bruce Wilcox has developed a weekly worshipping community at Carefree Manor, a local senior's

care facility. Each week the residents gather for worship, preaching and prayer. The presence of Christ is tangible. The group has drawn in not only residents, but family members and even staff. Has God called you to reach out to the homeless? In Quesnel, BC, a group of three women work together each week to host a ‘Circle of Hope’ at a local homeless shelter. In a meeting room they provide a place for anyone to come, talk and enjoy a cup of coffee. They have entered the space of the people and relate to them in their own situations. Who is it God has called you to reach? How can you enter into their culture or gathering space, not to take control, but to be the presence of Jesus among them?

*(NOTE: An outreach story from your community, an experience from someone in your congregation, or a congregational project can be highlighted here. Share with your congregation how your WMS group is moving beyond the huddle and living the good news in the community around your church family.)*

When Jesus sent out the disciples, he empowered them and gave them what they needed—his power and authority. He set the boundaries so they would be sent out vulnerable and dependent on the communities they were reaching. He also gave them one more instruction and that had to do with the responses they would encounter.

To be the presence of Jesus in any culture, group or situation doesn’t mean that all you do will be received with celebration and joy. Jesus was mocked and rejected and just plain ignored by many people of his day. He was challenged and disputed by the people in power while those who were most on the fringe of society found in him exactly what they were looking for. The responses to Jesus’ ministry were varied. The disciples also found that some welcomed them with their message while others would not. That is a reality of being sent out by Jesus.

We cannot become discouraged by those who reject the gifts of God that we bring with us. We all like to hear stories of what we consider great missionary successes where many people’s lives are changed and churches are built up and filled. However, most missionaries can tell you of disheartening times when it seems like no one was listening. They are but a lone voice, crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord, Make straight paths in the desert a highway for our God!” Maybe you have felt like that. Have you had a friend with whom you have been trying to share the hope you have in Jesus, only to find they just aren’t interested? Have you continued to provide food hampers to people

who don't seem to get out of the negative cycles of poverty and struggle in their lives? Rejection and disappointment is a very real part of being sent out into the world. The world doesn't function or believe as we do in our church huddle. Jesus wants his disciples to be ready for it, to expect it.

When it happens, Jesus tells them, don't let that rejection cling to you. Don't stop going out because sometimes people don't want to receive the healing you have been empowered to offer. Don't stop loving and proclaiming the kingdom because some people don't want to hear what you have to tell them. Simply walk away and shake off the dust of their rejection so that it doesn't cling to your spirit and make you doubt your call.

This doesn't mean that we give up easily. There are times that we can focus so much on what isn't meeting our expectations that we miss the way that people are being touched by Jesus through us. The Native ministries in our church have recognized that to be the presence of Jesus among First Nations people often means hanging in for long seasons while trust is built out of the rubble of the residential school experience. This may be true of others that you are called to reach as well. Don't give up, but don't let hard times and rejection cling to your feet as you walk out of the huddle into the world.

Jesus sent out his disciples as the first string of the team. The whole team, the entire body of Christ is called to go out in mission. We are called to take encouragement from the huddle of the church, but then go and do our real work of healing and proclamation in the world around us. Jesus gives us the power and authority for spiritual and physical healing in a world full of hurts and confusion. He sends us out in a position of vulnerability and dependence. It is in this way that the real power of the gospel can best be heard, when we relinquish our own control and enter into the lives and culture of others. We do not beg or seek things for our own benefit, but spend ourselves for the sake of the gospel and other people. When we encounter opposition or rejection, we simply let go and do not get discouraged or let the spirit of rejection cling to our hearts. We are a sent people. Let's get out of our huddle and out onto the playing field!

*The worship resources for Mission Awareness Sunday have been written by the Rev. Shannon Bell. Shannon Bell along with her husband Jon Wyminga are part of the mission team of the Cariboo Presbyterian House Church in BC. They live in the remote First Nations community of Ndzakoh in a log cabin in the bush. Their vision is to bring the healing power of Jesus Christ to the community and reserves around them in a way that honours the beautiful culture of the Dakelh people.*