

Sermon Sparkler for the Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

Did you ever think about the layers of leadership in the Jesus movement? I guess when I imagine Jesus I tend to see him riding around on a boat with the 12, but there were in fact other followers as well.

Just to put all the pieces on the chess board, in Galilee there was Jesus' inner circle, Peter, James, and John, then the 12 male disciples and the women. There is also this group of 70 (or 72, more on that in a second), who serve in a sort of John the Baptist role, preparing the way for Jesus, doing the ground work for Jesus in 35 villages before Jesus shows up. Within this same sphere, radiating out from Jesus the center, we also have the multitudes who follow him. Then there is also a group in Bethany, who we read about more in John's Gospel, and finally Jesus' family, who initially disowns him, but later joins the early church.

In today's gospel we read about 70, or 72, people being sent out. There are all kinds of things that these numbers may be indicating

1. 72 would indicate six representatives of each of the 12 tribes, so Jesus is reconstituting the united kingdom of Israel.
2. 70 is made up of 7x10, seven numerically representing perfection and ten represents completion.
3. Alternatively, this points to a theme more common in Matthew's Gospel than Luke's, that Jesus is a Moses figure and just as Moses delegated his work to 70 elders (Numbers 11:16-30) so too Jesus does the same.
4. Or, it could be pointing to the universal scope of following Jesus, one disciple for each nation said to be descended from Noah's sons.

And while we're waist deep in numbers, we might as well take a moment to reflect it is upon why the disciples go 2 by 2. On one hand, there is the simple comfort of companionship. On the other, it is done in order to corroborate their stories.

For example:

One guy says, "Jesus fed the 5,000!"

The person they are telling says, "No, way!"

Then the second follower of Jesus can back the first up, saying, "Yes, way!"

These witnesses are participating in the clash between Jesus and Satan that started at the temptation in the desert. Jesus rejects becoming king over all the nations when it is offered to him for the price of worshipping Satan, but affirms sending out people to every nation in order to testify to the Kingdom of God coming near.

- ✎ Which of the above four explanations for 70/72 might speak to your congregation?
- ✎ How do relationships formed between your congregants strengthen their witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? How could your preaching encourage more such positive relationships?
- ✎ You are a herald of the Reign of God, I pray God's blessing on your message this Sunday!