

Just go (Luke 10:1-11, 16-20)

The people of Jesus show up empty-handed and vulnerable.

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I am definitely an Enneagram type one. When I am unprepared for some task or challenge, it is a devastating blow. I still have nightmares about arriving at school without the necessary texts, or losing my room assignments, or generally wandering about school with an impending sense of doom that I will be late and unprepared.

When Jesus sends out his followers with empty backpacks, the barest of directions, and the caution that “I’m sending you like lambs into the midst of wolves,” my anxiety for them skyrockets. Clearly this isn’t an easy assignment for anyone with a penchant for planning ahead. Is Jesus capitalizing on their youthful optimism or the euphoric crowd mentality of those who have witnessed his miraculous power? What can we learn about obedience to Jesus from this seemingly reckless initiative?

Indigenous activist and writer Sarah Augustine suggests that Jesus doesn’t want God’s great dream to be held up by risk assessment—and that too often we are guilty of over-analyzing and under-acting. Immediately prior to this passage, some people who want to follow Jesus request time to take care of other details, to prepare their family and give adequate goodbyes. Jesus’ reply challenges their loyalties and demands immediate obedience (Luke 9:57-62). It may seem like a cold response, but we know how a little thing can too often turn into a long delay. So when Jesus sends them out with his message, there is no dawdling over what to pack. Just go. Do the task. Obey.

In addition to straightforward obedience, Jesus' instructions prioritize relationships that begin from a sense of powerlessness. His people arrive empty-handed and vulnerable. The gifts that they carry with them are God's peace and blessing, and these are to be shared with anyone open to receiving them. There is no economic exchange, no appearance of authority. Vulnerability on one side and hospitality on the other side are what open the door for their message. No need to stick a foot in a door that's closing. Jesus instructs them to walk away from the places where they are unwelcomed.

God's dream is never a coerced reality. Although this dream is ever present as a possibility, it becomes known only when there is a reciprocal relationship within a community. And a community that finds wholeness is filled with joy.

A final caution in this passage is the reminder that the joy found in sharing God's Good News does not come from personal success in the mission. It's because the kingdom of God, the great dream of God, is expanded. Being faithful messengers takes unselfish commitment and quick obedience, with a hefty dose of love and wisdom. This tremendous project is placed into the care of ordinary people who boldly follow Jesus' instructions.