

Raise your hand if you have ever volunteered for an organization. I'd bet most of you at one time or another have volunteered for a cause you believed in. Maybe you helped collect canned goods for a community kitchen, or volunteered with the homeless, or sold Girl Scout cookies when your kids/grandkids were young, or volunteered at a church event. We all have different causes we believe in and reasons for volunteering. **HOWEVER, SOME OF US VOLUNTEERS FOR THE STRANGEST REASONS ...**

A few years ago, NASA advertised for volunteers for a study on how space flight affects healthy bodies. They recruited fit, healthy volunteers who matched the general physical profile of their astronauts. Then they asked these volunteers to spend 15 weeks in a hospital bed so they could measure how this bed-rest affects human fitness and functioning. **Fifteen weeks--In a hospital bed.** Most of us would be ready to climb the walls after two days.

A Swedish university recruited healthy young volunteers to eat four cupcakes every day for six weeks for a study on the effects of fat on the human body. The volunteers weren't supposed to change anything else about their health and fitness routines or their daily habits. Just eat four cupcakes a day for six weeks

But that doesn't match what the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation in Hampden Township asked of their volunteers. They recruited a small group of volunteers to get drunk so their officers could get training in using the Standardized Field Sobriety Test.

One of the strangest volunteer opportunities I've ever heard about happened several years ago when an author named Shelley Jackson asked for volunteers to help her publish her latest short story. The story titled "Skin" was 2,095 words long. And, according to The Associated Press, Jackson wanted to publish it by tattooing the story, one word at a time, on the skin of volunteers. Jackson tattooed the first word of the story on her own wrist. In a very short period of time, she had more than enough volunteers from all over the world who offered their bodies for her project.

What an incredible idea! If you want to spread a story all over the world, then tattoo the text—one word at a time—on the skin of willing strangers. At least you will gain the attention of the news media.

When I stop and think about how a small group of volunteers spread the message and the mission of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to the whole world, while facing down persecution and poverty and beatings and imprisonment and cultural differences and language differences, I am amazed. How was it possible? And where did it all begin? **That's what our scripture lesson is about this morning.**

Our lesson begins with these words, *"After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"*

Notice what is happening here. Jesus has set his face TOWARD Jerusalem. Only he knows that he is heading toward his arrest, torture and crucifixion. Only he knows that this will be the end of his earthly mission. **It's time to pass the torch to his followers, his disciples, so that they could carry his message and continue his mission.**

So, he appointed (72) of them and sent them ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, *'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'*

It reminds me of an old story about an Army sergeant who came into the barracks one morning and asked if anyone in his squad knew shorthand. The men in his squad thought that sounded great. Finally, a task involving no physical labor—just sitting and writing shorthand—and so all of them raised their hands.

"Good," said the sergeant, *"They're SHORT-HANDED in the mess hall!"* In this passage Jesus is saying, *"We are SHORT-HANDED for this mission. You don't get it yet, but I'm sending you out to the ends of the earth."*

The disciples don't realize it but this is a critical moment in their journey with Jesus. This is the moment when Jesus' disciples officially become his apostles. This is important. In verse 1 where it says Jesus sent them out two by two, the verb used there (**sent**) is *apostellw*. **He literally "apostled" them into the world.**

Think about the difference between a disciple and an apostle. A disciple is simply a student or a devoted follower of a teacher. **Apostle, on the other hand, means "sent out" or "a person sent."** There is a significant difference. You need wisdom and humility to be a disciple. But you don't need power. You can be a disciple your whole life. **But you're not an apostle until you go out and share the message and ministry of Jesus with others. THAT IS WHEN YOU NEED GOD'S "POWER!"** That's when you need the authority and anointing of the spirit of Jesus Christ. That's when you need the power to see and to love others with the same passionate, sacrificial love God has for them. That's when you need the power to announce the kingdom of God to a disbelieving or hostile culture. That's when you need the power to heal the sick and cast out demons. **That's when you need the power to stand up for truth and light in a world that embraces darkness and lies.**

If you sit in church each week and doubt the power of the Holy Spirit, if you sit in church each week and don't feel like you are being prepared for acts of mercy and justice and truth that are greater than you can accomplish in your own strength, if your worship and study isn't leading you to walk out of this church and look for someone who needs the Good News of the Kingdom of God, **THEN YOU ARE STILL A "DISCIPLE," NOT A "APOSTLE."** *And you won't receive the power and authority and the vision and the Presence of the Spirit of the Living Christ inside of you.*

So, if you are ready to step into your calling as an apostle, there are three primary steps to the process that we can find in today's lesson.

THE 1ST CALLING OF THE "APOSTLE" IS TO "PRAY." In our lesson for today, we read, **"Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field . . ."** There are (5) five different Greek words used for "prayer" in the New Testament. Each one has a slightly different meaning and portrays a different approach in our relationship to God.

The word used here for **"Ask the Lord of the harvest . . ."** is the Greek word **DEOMAI**. It is used in the New Testament to refer to **the act of begging or pleading**.

In Luke 5:12, a man covered in leprosy falls on his face in front of Jesus and begs, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

In Luke 8, a demon-possessed man begs Jesus not to torment him. After Jesus heals him, he begs Jesus to be allowed to follow him.

In Luke 9, a father begs Jesus to heal his sick son. **In each these passages, the word used was DEOMAI.**

If you have ever prayed from a heart of desperation or brokenness, then you understand the concept of DEOMAI. *And that's the kind of heart Jesus wants us to have when we pray for those who need to hear the message of Jesus.* Jesus is saying, "Beg for them, plead for them, let your heart break for them." Love them enough to pray for them as desperately as a parent prays for their sick child. Because that kind of love and prayer will then motivate you to go.

In 1905, E. Stanley Jones was a student at Asbury College, a Christian school in the tiny town of Wilmore, Kentucky. He was planning to become a lawyer. Jones and three friends were praying together one evening when they experienced the Holy Spirit empowering their prayers. Within days, a spiritual revival broke out on the college's campus, and it spread to the town of Wilmore. It was during this time of revival that Jones experienced God calling him to the mission field.

In 1907, he moved to India to minister to the untouchables—the lowest-caste citizens there in that society. He respected the culture and traditions of the Indian people and did not try to impose Western culture or practices on them. Soon his ministry also began attracting well-educated and influential Indian citizens who appreciated his ability to share his faith with intellectual rigor and respect. He brought together people from different faiths to discuss their religious experiences. He was so influential at bringing people together in a spirit of understanding and mutual respect that he was invited to

participate in political negotiations not only in India, but in Africa and Asia. Before his death in India in 1973, he had preached to thousands of people, served as a voice of conscience to world leaders, and written 28 books, with the royalties devoted to various church ministries. Once, while reflecting on the small prayer meeting that motivated him to become a world-changing missionary, Jones said, *“Be careful how you pray. You may be the answer.”*

He’s right. If we pray in the spirit of DEOMAI, begging the Lord to work in and through us, then He will answer us. AND WE WILL BE THAT ANSWER!

The next calling of the apostle is the calling to go, OFFER “PEACE” AND “HEALING” to the sick. In verse five of this lesson we read, *“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house . . .’* Have you ever thought about how critical peace was to Christ’s ministry?

There is a great story of a medieval knight who returned to his castle one evening looking like a bloody mess. His armor was dented. His face was scarred. His horse was limping. The lord of the castle asked, “What hath befallen you, Sir Knight?” The knight said, “Oh, Sire, I have been laboring in your service, robbing and burning and pillaging your enemies to the west.” “What?!?” cried the nobleman. “But I don’t *have* any enemies to the west!” “Oh.” The knight paused. Finally, he said, “Well, you do now.”

Jesus was very specific in telling his apostles to go in his spirit, a spirit of peace. Christians have not always come in a spirit of peace. **If we had, Christ’s kingdom would already have come on earth as it is in heaven . . .**

In verse 9 we also read, *“Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”* Healing and proclaiming the Kingdom of God were also at the heart of Christ’s ministry. In his three years of ministry recorded in the Gospels this is what Jesus’ daily schedule looked like. He went out, he offered peace to all who would receive him, and he healed the sick. Read through the New Testament and compare how many times Jesus preached in the synagogues versus how many times Jesus taught, preached, and healed people in the marketplaces and in the fields and in their homes. We cannot fulfill the calling of God in the comfort of the church. That’s not what Jesus meant for us to do. I’m not saying that to start a stampede toward the doors. Not yet. Wait until the closing hymn. Inside these doors, we grow as disciples. Outside these doors, we go as apostles. We’ve got work to do. But that work must be done in the spirit of the Lord Jesus. So, our first calling as apostles is to pray. Our next calling is to go, offer peace and heal the sick.

And our final and most important calling as apostles is to ANNOUNCE THE COMING OF THE “KINGDOM OF GOD.” The kingdom of God is the world as it will be when God rules over all the world. It will be the kingdom of *justice and the fullness of peace.* When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, *“Let Your kingdom come, let Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,”* this is what he was referring to. The birth of Jesus served as the starter’s pistol that announced creation’s race toward the fully realized kingdom of God when Jesus returns as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Until that day, we are called to announce the kingdom of God with our words and even more so with our lives. As apostles, part of our *deomai* prayer should be to ask God to show us how we can contribute to the causes of peace, justice, mercy and righteousness in our community and in our world.

You may remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as he contemplated his death just two months before his assassination. He said, *“Every now and then I think about my own death, and I think about my own funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize. . . I’d like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I’d like for somebody to say that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to love somebody . . . say that I was a drum major for justice . . . for peace . . . for righteousness. I just want to leave a committed life behind.”*

Jesus told his apostles, *“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”* You are here today in these church walls because someone prayed this prayer and someone responded to this prayer. You are here today because (72) believers prayed and went and offered peace and healing and announced the coming of the kingdom of God, and their message and their ministry, empowered by the Spirit and authority of Jesus Christ, spread to every continent on earth. **BUT THE WORK IS NOT DONE!!** **Jesus calls you to be his apostle.** I hope that when you walk out of these church doors TODAY, you will take your part in the greatest mission and message in the history of the world, **to announce the coming of the kingdom of God until the day Jesus returns to make it so. AMEN!!**