

# Laggan and Newtonmore

## Church of Scotland

**Rev. Catherine Buchan**

**The Sending 2**

**18th Nov 2018**

Ecclesiastes 4:4-12

Luke 10:1-20

If you think that the passage from Luke's gospel has a familiar ring to it, then I am glad to hear it! We have heard this before haven't we? In Laggan we read the Matthew version of this passage each time we met to consider our Future Focus. We have also read Matthew's version in this past year since we started our Path of Renewal.

But maybe you are thinking, no, it seems to have been more recently than that. Well, it could be you are thinking of just two weeks ago. Two weeks ago we did not read this same passage, but we did read one that is very similar. Two weeks ago we read the beginning of Luke chapter 9. They do not tell of the same incident, but there are a lot of similarities: followers of Jesus are send out to do Jesus work, they are told to make no physical preparation, and take nothing with them, and they are told what to do when they are welcomed and when they are not.

Two very similar incidents, but since Luke has decided to tell us of both, we should look not only at the similarities but at the differences there are differences, to see what else Luke has to tell us about how Jesus trained his disciples.

The first difference is that while on the previous occasion it was the newly appointed twelve who were send out, this time we are told it is either seventy or seventy-two, depending on how you read the Greek. So this sending was not just for those chosen to be closest to Jesus, those with the most intensive training. This sending was of a wider group of followers. That is important, and it is especially important for churches, like ours which have some of the congregation set aside to be

leaders: we all ours elders, but other churches have similar groups with different titles. It is very easy for people who are not in these groups, in our case who are not elders, to assume, often without even thinking about it, that Jesus' call to go and to do does not apply to them, only to the Session. Without thinking about it, we would then equate Jesus calling of the 12 with our ordaining of elders. And maybe there is a bit of a correlation. But Jesus did not only have twelve disciples. He also had a wider group of followers and they too are being sent out. So none of us can think that we have nothing to learn from this story.

The second difference is that we are told that they went in twos. In Chapter 9 Luke does not specify this – they might have gone singly or in one great big group, for all we know - but here he does. It is important for him this time to tell us that although more were sent, they were not expected to go alone. They went in pairs, so that there was always someone to share with, someone to encourage you or to be encouraged by you. Two, as the writer of Ecclesiastes says, are better than one. We thought about that last Saturday when our presbytery met together with the presbytery of Lochaber, to think about all we have in common and what we could do better together. For most of us, except the extreme loners, it is reassuring to think that we do not have to do things alone, but that we have support from each other.

This time they are not explicitly given power to cast out evil and to heal. Verse 17, when the disciples report back, indicates that they did have this power, but this was not what they were told to do – they were told to declare the presence of the kingdom of God with them, in word and in deed. That is our calling as well, the calling of all of us. To declare the Kingdom of God in word and deed. The way Jesus went about it was usually to act and then explain that this was what the Kingdom of God looks like. And the acts we do need not be spectacular for the message to get home. One example: when I was nineteen, I spent the summer volunteering in the kitchen of a Christian Youth centre in Austria. We worked long hours six days a week – with staggered days off – and we received the equivalent of about £3 a week – so pocket money, not pay. One of the policies of the centre was that the youthful guests should help by drying the dishes, and this gave us kitchen workers our best contact with them. I well remember one day the young man drying the plates asked me how much we were paid for our work – I think he had been thinking it was a nice place to work, which it was. I told him 27 schillings a week (this was before the euro) and his jaw dropped. “But why do you

do it, then?" he asked. And so I had a chance to use my halting German to tell him that I did it for the love of Christ. In other words that this was part of what the Kingdom of God looked like.

Anything we do because of the love of God, caring for a neighbour, visiting the Mains, helping children or parents, writing letters of those in authority to campaign for the right, listening, praying – anything we do because of the love of God is something which proclaims the Kingdom of God. Sometimes we need to use words to help people make the connections.

When the seventy (two) are sent out, the warnings about a possible hostile reception are starker than when the twelve first went. Last time they were just told what to do if no one wanted to know them – to leave and go on to find those who did. This time they are warned that they were being sent out like lambs going not the midst of wolves – hardly a reassuring picture! Your average lamb will not be welcomed by the wolves except in one way, and that way will be fatal to the lamb. But, of course, when we follow Jesus, we follow the lamb of God who was indeed sent into the world as into a pack of wolves and who did in fact meet with the fate that might have been supposed. We should never be surprised when things become difficult, or when we meet opposition: Jesus never promised that it would be any different.

These are the main differences, but there are also other things which Jesus says in this sending – he seems more aware of the propensity of people not to pay proper attention to him and his message of God's kingdom. People have seen his deeds of power, but these have not been enough to make them repent – which means change their ways. Maybe Jesus too has been learning about the shape of his mission and the reception his message is likely to get. People don't like changing their ways. We know that. You know it, because you don't like it either. I remember telling you once before that even when people are told that if they don't change their current practices they will likely end up killing them, up to 90% of people make no change. Changing is hard, and the very thought of it is uncomfortable. Jesus came to realise that asking people to repent, which means change, was not going to meet with a ready agreement. And nothing has changed about that.

When the seventy (two) come back they are exultant: they have had their first taste of doing God's work and they are amazed at what God has done through them. In all our thinking about going out and doing new things, we should never forget this. It is a wonderful, exciting thing to see God at work and to know that by God's grace you are in the mix. Yes, it takes courage and change and willingness and may at times be uncomfortable, but when you take the plunge and speak that word or offer that help or try that new thing and you see God using it, there is nothing like it. It is the best that life can offer.

They came back on a real high, and Jesus rejoices with them. He is delighted to see their jubilation! You can imagine him greeting them with high fives and hugs. He tells them that what they have been doing has been defeating the very power of evil itself, so they are right to be joyful. But he goes even further. "Don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you," he says, "Here is something even better! Rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

After Jesus had sent out the twelve and they had come back, Luke has given us the story of the transfiguration, when Jesus took Peter, James and John – his inner circle – up the mountain and met with Moses and Elijah. While they were away, the remaining nine disciples had been brought an epileptic boy who they discovered they could not heal. They had been given power to heal, but here was a case which would not yield to them. It must have been a bit of a come down after their time out on mission. And Jesus knows that there will come these disappointing times to all of us. It will not always be hugs and high fives and Satan falling like lightning from heaven. When it is, that is wonderful and we should rejoice, but what is always true, and always wonderful is this: that your names are written in heaven.

We are sent as lambs to wolves, but our names are written in heaven.

Sometimes a town will not welcome us, but our names are written in heaven.

People will not want to change to welcome the kingdom of God, but our names are written in heaven.

We will find it hard to make the changes that following Jesus asks of us, but our names are written in heaven.

Life will not always be easy, for all sorts of reasons, but our names are written in heaven, and for that reason we should rejoice and be glad.

Amen