

October has arrived. The hot summer has passed, and mornings and evenings have grown considerably cooler, bringing the distinct feel of autumn. This summer saw record-breaking heat, causing water shortages in some regions, yet the rice harvest is said to be nearly the same as usual. However, with many farmers nationwide increasing their planted area, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries forecasts a yield increase of about 560,000 tons compared to last year (roughly 107% of last year's level). Every autumn, I recall Hymn 504 from the Church Hymnal. "Fields of ripening grain stretch as far as the eye can see, Waves of grain stand tall, fragrant in the shade. The bending ears turn golden, awaiting the swift sickle. Come, come, let us hasten, before the time passes." We once sang this hymn at a hymn-singing gathering, and it is truly a fitting praise for the harvest season. In keeping with this autumn of harvest, today I would like us to hear the Word from Luke 10:1 and following. It is where the Lord Jesus chooses seventy-two men, apart from the twelve disciples, and sends them out to the villages of Judea.

Shortly before this, Jesus and his disciples entered a Samaritan village intending to preach the gospel. However, the report from the messengers' states that the Samaritans did not welcome Jesus (9:53). The Jews despised the Samaritans and had long avoided contact with them. This likely contributed to the cold reception Jesus and his disciples received from the Samaritans. This incident also hints at the difficulties inherent in evangelism. In the following chapter 10, the group again enters a Jewish village. At this time, the Lord Jesus chose seventy-two men and sent them out two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he himself intended to go. This number seventy-two appears as seventy in some other manuscripts. Whether 72 or 70, this number is said to represent the total number of nations in the world at that time. If so, these 72 men were the first missionaries appointed by Jesus. They went out in pairs to preach. Even today, some denominations follow this biblical account and conduct missionary work in pairs. When I was a student, I often encountered two young foreign men traveling together on bicycles. Both were incredibly handsome, and I instantly thought, "I'm beaten!" They too are believed to belong to a Christian denomination. Why two? It was so that when one became discouraged by the difficulties of evangelism, the other could lift him up. My wife helps me in many ways too. So, reading this account of how the Lord Jesus sent them out in pairs to the front lines of evangelism, I feel He truly understood the immense challenge of this work.

Therefore, the words concerning sending workers are spoken: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field." Right now, I am thinking about ways to bring children into our church. My wife and I often discuss this over meals. One church provides the first floor of its building as an after-school care facility (Minamidai Gospel Lutheran Church). Another church runs a children's cafeteria, inviting local children to eat curry together. At Kurigasawa Church, we're also pondering how we might create an opportunity to invite children to church. The main hurdle is finding volunteers. But listing reasons why we can't do it won't help. In today's passage, Jesus says, "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." True to His word, we want to start by praying earnestly to draw children in. Jesus continues, "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves." This is a biblical phrase that comes to mind when sending out children or students we have carefully nurtured into the world. They are safe at their parents' side. Even if something difficult happens, they can immediately reach out and protect them. No shepherd would ever release lambs raised with such care into a pack of wolves. It's unthinkable. Yet, when sending His disciples to the front lines of mission, the Lord tells them they must undertake this unthinkable adventure. Without the work and dedication of such lambs, the great work of building God's kingdom cannot be accomplished.

Moreover, this lamb is sent to the front lines of evangelism with nothing but the clothes on its back—no wallet,

no bag, no shoes. It truly has nothing to rely on but God. When I graduated from university and entered the Seinan Gakuin University Faculty of Theology, I hired Kuroneko Yamato's home delivery service for my move. All the belongings from my room fit into a single one of their light trucks. Moreover, the moving cost was surprisingly low. So low, in fact, that I forgot to pay the fee... When my belongings arrived at the seminary's bachelor dormitory in Fukuoka, a senior seminary student helped unload them and was astonished at how little I had. My life as a seminary student truly began with nothing, light as a feather. Yet, I never once felt troubled by having so few possessions.

Now, what did these disciples, sent to the front lines of evangelism, do for the people they encountered along the way, following the words of the Lord Jesus? There were three main things. The first was that they preached the word. They spoke about the kingdom of God. They told people, "The kingdom of God is near." At the same time, they performed the work of healing the sick. They freed those suffering from illness from their afflictions. This was the same thing the Lord Jesus did when He began His ministry in Galilee. The disciples who proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom of God did not just speak; they also helped those suffering from illness. This showed that salvation was not merely a matter of the soul, but concerned both body and soul. Today's church is the same. If someone is hungry, we offer them something to eat. If someone is lonely, we draw near, become a companion, and free them from solitude. If someone carries a heavy burden, we bear it with them. In this way, if anyone is in need, it doesn't matter what it is. We want to be a church that does whatever small good we can, becoming a help to them.

Second, what the disciples did was pray. Jesus tells them that when they enter a house, they should first pray, "May peace be upon this house." What does it mean to pray for peace? The word "peace" originally comes from the Hebrew word shalom. It is the Greek word translated from that. However, the Hebrew word shalom carries a breadth that the simple word "peace" cannot fully encompass. It signifies more than mere safety or absence of harm. It denotes a state where individual lives and society as a whole are vibrant and full of life, overflowing with vitality, where all conditions for happiness—whether for the individual or the community—are fulfilled. This is shalom. The disciples' prayer here, "May there be peace," was a prayer for such abundant, overflowing life. Simply put, they prayed for the happiness of each family in every home they visited. In this sense, the church's prayer is one that walks alongside each person, desiring the resolution of their problems, praying for their happiness. I hear that in some churches, during worship, attendees stand up and take time to shake hands with their neighbors, saying "the peace of the Lord." We too, in our church, wish to continually, ceaselessly pray this prayer for shalom.

Thirdly, what the disciples did was to immerse themselves in the life of the household that had taken them in and accept it. As I wrote in the opening remarks of the weekly bulletin, in Jewish society at that time, there were people who provided lodging for evangelists proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God, thereby supporting their work. They upheld the ancient Jewish custom of "hospitality to travelers," offering meals and backing the evangelists' journeys. Later, near the end of Chapter 10, we encounter the sisters Martha and Mary. They too were such supporters. Crucially, when staying at a host's home, it was important to properly eat the meals set before them at the table. Jesus' disciples did this. Eating gratefully and with relish whatever meal was provided was a very important matter. They expressed gratitude for the host's kindness and gratefully ate everything served at the table. The evangelists showed gratitude for the food to be accepted by the family. This principle applies to us today as well. In church, too, we often have opportunities to eat together. At such times, whatever the menu, let us make mealtime a time of thanksgiving, filled with gratitude for those who prepared it. The kingdom of God comes at the table where we share bread together. After this, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper. Just as the first evangelists sincerely gave thanks and ate the meals offered in the homes that welcomed them, we too wish to cherish the daily blessings of our own tables.