

Celebrate with Joy!
Faith in Action Celebration Worship
April 20, 2008
Luke 10:17–23

Did you have a good day? How many of you did some kind of service project this weekend as part of our *Faith in Action* program? In case you haven't been here lately, for the last four weeks, we've been talking about what it would look like to put our faith into action in our community in really concrete ways. In daily devotions and small group discussions and messages from the platform or pulpit, we've been talking and thinking about some pretty challenging ideas. And we've challenged every one of us to not only *go* to church, but to *be* the church – to put our faith into action. And this weekend, we took the challenge. This weekend, we've had church-wide service projects focusing on our community – and even beyond, as we sent off a team to New Orleans. I want to begin tonight's message by hearing about some of your experiences, some of what God has done in you and through you during these last few weeks. When you come to speak, please tell us your name, how you put your faith in action this weekend, what God did through your service, and maybe most importantly, what God did *in you* through our *Faith in Action* study, messages and your service.

The gospels speak often about the interactions Jesus had with his close-knit group of followers often called “the 12.” But Jesus also had a wider circle of people around Him who formed the larger community of His followers. In our passage for tonight from Luke's gospel, Jesus sends 72 of that wider circle on a short-term mission trip to be His ambassadors in the region around them, much like we sent off 8 folks this morning to be our ambassadors in New Orleans this week, and many more to our surrounding community yesterday and today. I want to look at Jesus' response to the 72 when they returned from serving in His name, and see if we can also learn something about Jesus' response to our serving.

Luke 10:17-20. If you were here last week, you might remember that we talked about “God math.” God takes seemingly small things, ordinary efforts, and multiplies them in powerful ways. Here we see that in action: The disciples return and report to Jesus that their faith, put into action with God's power, made an impact. A *big* impact. And the disciples were pumped. Before their little mission trip, they had just been part of a large, diverse gathering of uninformed spectators of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was the expert, the traveling rabbi, the wonder-working Messiah who performed miracles while all these folks just looked on. But this assignment was different. This was firsthand experience of God's power working its way into people's lives through *them*. Did you hear me? *God's power worked its way into people's lives through them.* So you can imagine how excited they must have been. They had discovered that even the demons would submit to them when they invoked Jesus' authority.

And Jesus does nothing to dampen their enthusiasm. In fact, Jesus shares what *He* saw as they ministered in His name. Jesus kicks it up a notch by highlighting a reality that was beyond their ability to comprehend. Jesus could see something they couldn't see. “I saw Satan fall like lightning...” The disciples' actions dealt the evil one a formidable blow. When the 72 acted in obedience to Jesus, Satan was dethroned.

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” What was Jesus saying? Here’s what I think He’s saying: He’s saying that, as a result of the disciples’ actions, Satan lost his grip in the variety of people and places and situations where the disciples had ministered. In other words, wherever the disciples were working, a spiritual transformation took place. Not only did physical situations change. Things changed spiritually. Everywhere the disciples were preaching, healing, serving, and casting out demons, Jesus saw Satan falling.

Today, even though we couldn’t see it, Satan fell like lightning from heaven when we worked together at Urban Promise. Satan fell like lightning from heaven when our folks shared breakfast with some homeless folks and then walked the streets of Wilmington with them, experiencing just for a short time what their life is like every day. Satan fell like lightning when our Worship Team led worship and shared music and joined others to visit with patients at the VA Hospital. Satan fell like lightning when folks visited with residents of Forwood Manor and Sunrise Assisted Living and Foulk Manor North and shared the love of God with them. Satan fell like lightning when we helped our brothers and sisters from Church of Our Savior serve the hungry from their food pantry. Satan fell like lightning when we cleaned up an elderly neighbor’s yard and landscaped the Memorial Garden at the Sellers Senior Center. Satan falls like lightning from heaven whenever you serve another with a heart full of God’s love; or take pains to put another’s needs in front of your own, or follow a prompting to put your faith into action.

Our faith in action combined with God’s power knocks Satan down. Our faith in action changes things spiritually. The disciples had the power to transform the spiritual dimension of the world in which they lived by the power and authority Jesus gave to them. *And so do we.* When we serve others, when we put our faith into action as we did this weekend, God gives us power and authority to transform – not only physical things like hunger or loneliness or gardens or yards – but the spiritual dimensions of *our* world – we may not be able to see it with our natural eyes, but Jesus sees it. Satan falls – Satan loses his grip, loses his power to deceive and enslave and destroy lives when we serve others, help others, care for others, love others in Jesus’ name.

But as amazing as that statement is, Jesus goes on to point out an even greater reason to celebrate. Jesus says, “Don’t rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Names written in heaven. My friends, as awesome as what you did for people this weekend is, physically and spiritually, that’s not the real reason to celebrate. As much good as you accomplished this weekend, that’s not the real reason to celebrate. The most important thing isn’t that we broke the power of Satan today as we served. The most important thing for us to celebrate today and every day is that our names are written in heaven. **Listen: You are registered as one of God’s own.** Jesus said the real reason to celebrate is that we belong to God. We work for God. We live for God.

So don’t get caught up in the size of your impact. It may not look all that great to you. Don’t be discouraged because you feel like you didn’t see much change as a result of your efforts this weekend. Jesus was clear that this was to put the emphasis on the wrong thing. How much *we* think we accomplish or how effective *we* think we are has little to do with how God measures our service. Obedient, willing service done out of a loving heart that desires to honor God is always in response to what Christ has already done for us. Our small acts of compassion are in

response to what Jesus did for us on the cross. And because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, our names are written in heaven.

Jesus goes on: **Luke 10:21–23**. “Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit...” When Jesus sees that His followers have gotten just a glimpse of the power of their mission, the meaning and purpose of their lives on earth, He is filled with joy. When we put our faith into action it is a signal all the way to heaven that we have understood the meaning of our particular mission here on earth. I think we brought Jesus joy today, church. And here’s why: “No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son *and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*” Jesus has seen His followers carry on His ministry—they did what Jesus did—and He has seen that common, everyday people come to know God through them. The way Jesus reveals the Father to others is through us. Jesus connects the dots between His followers putting their faith into action and people coming to know God through Jesus. **God comes to people through people.** When we do what Jesus did, we show the world what God is like. When people see us working for Jesus in the name of Jesus, they really do see Jesus. God comes to people through people – and this weekend, my friends, God came to people through you.

You took a chance this weekend to put your faith into action, to strike a blow against the power of Satan, and to be living witnesses to the continuing work and love of Jesus. It was one act. Now I challenge us all to make it a habit. The purpose of our *Faith in Action* project has not been merely to get to today and pat ourselves on the back for all the good we did and then go back to business as usual. I hope that there’s *never* business as usual again in this church. I hope that your life has been forever changed by this experience. *Forever changed.* I hope that God has challenged you and changed you by our messages, by the daily devotions, your small group discussions, and especially by your experiences in service this weekend. I hope that our *church* has been forever changed by this experience. Because what we do inside these four walls on Sunday morning or on Tuesday evening or Wednesday evening or at Bible study is good and it’s necessary, but it is not *all* we are called to be and to do.

If we want to be the church God has called us to be – an Acts 2 biblically functioning community – if we want to bring Jesus joy, if we want to neutralize the power of Satan in people’s lives, we *must* continue to serve others in Jesus’ name. We must continue to pour ourselves out in compassion and love, in service and sacrifice, for those in need in our neighborhood, our community and even the world. And yes, it will cost us money and it will cost us time. It will cost us effort and it will cost us energy. It will force us to set our priorities differently. We’re going to have to learn to *think* differently about people and ministry. It may require us to do without something we want for ourselves or our building in order to give something substantial and much needed to someone else.

But if we will commit to continuing to love and to serve and to give as we have this weekend, we will **be** the church – the body of Christ – the physical presence of Jesus. Jesus will reveal the Father to people through us. **Jesus will reveal the Father to people through us.** God will use us to show the world His power and His purposes and His grace and His forgiveness and His healing and His love. And lives will be changed. Physically and spiritually. Our lives and others’ lives. And we will bring Jesus joy. And *that* is something to celebrate.