

Can you picture a cute fluffy little lamb? It is jumping with joy in the sunshine. Suddenly, a wolf creeps towards our cute little lamb. As I describe this scene, I am reminded of a cartoon I often saw about a wolf, sheep and a sheep dog who protects the gentle sheep. The wolf never actually gets any sheep that we see but the interesting part of the cartoon is when the whistle sounds to end the workday and the wolf and the dog chat as buddies going home for the day after a day on the job.

Jesus sent 70 people out to prepare the way for His arrival. He knew His time was limited and assigned this group to begin the work of telling others about the kingdom of God. In His words, He sends them out like lambs into the midst of wolves. When first reading this verse, we may think that Jesus is sending the people out to be eaten, out to be devoured by the mobs. And it may well have seemed like that to the 70. But what they do not remember is that they are not alone. Just like in the cartoon, they have a protector. God is there making sure they come to no harm from those hungry wolves.

They go out, not bringing anything with them. They rely on the hospitality of the people they go to visit. This was common in that era. Rabbis and other teachers would be looked after by the people in the villages. They would be given food and shelter wherever they went.

Jesus also warns them that if they are not looked after they are to shake the dust of that village off their feet and move on. Looking with our modern eyes at this, it seems strange. However, at that time, a disciple of a rabbi was said to walk in the dust of the rabbi. They would travel so close they would be in the dust of the rabbi. So, Jesus was telling the 70 that they were not to hold on to anything they had learned in the towns that shunned them but to move on. They were not to get feeling disgruntled but put the past behind them and move on. Great lesson for us today there! How often do we let ourselves hold on to things from the past and do not let ourselves move on?

Have a look at the picture on the screen (here).



You will see a woman named Fanny Crosby. Fanny was a woman who had every right to hold onto her past and let it ruin her future. At age 6 weeks, she became blind. She could have spent her life feeling sorry for herself and concentrating on how many things she could not do because of her blindness. But that was not what Fanny did. She spent her life glorifying God by writing beautiful hymns, songs and poems. She wrote over 8,000 hymns. We began our service with her hymn, "To God be the Glory". Fanny, when asked about her blindness, said this:

It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me.¹

¹ http://www.cyberhymnal.org/bio/c/r/o/crosby_fj.htm

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Fanny was a woman who did not allow the distractions around her to keep her from serving God. Not only did she write poetry to honour God, but she also is famous for her mission work with the poor. Many times, the meager fee she got for her work went towards caring for the poor and hungry. She met with many world leaders and wrote hymns for famous musicians. But it never was about gaining fame or fortune. Just as Jesus tells the 70, when they return amazed at the wonders they witnessed, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Fanny always gave the glory to God.

But what does all this have to do with us? We may not write hymns and we were not there to be sent out with the 70. However, God is still calling on the faithful to go out and prepare the way for people to receive Him. God will protect us just like the sheepdog, but we are to be God's frontrunners. And the harvest is ripe and plentiful, but the workers are still few. There are so many who are ripe to hear about Jesus.

I know many are hearing that message and thinking, that is way to complicated. I can't think of the right words to tell someone about God. I am too shy. I believe. Isn't that enough?

Look at the story of Naaman. He suffered from leprosy. His wife's maid knew there was a prophet, Elisha, who could heal him, so she told her mistress, who told Naaman. He then went and told his king who sent great riches to the king of the country, Elisha the prophet, lived in. Elisha heard and asked for Naaman to come to him. So Naaman travelled the distance and came to see Elisha. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." 2 Kings 5:10

A very simple task to be healed but what does Naaman do? He gets angry and says this is too simple. He expected Elisha do come out and do something difficult. He felt insulted. It was his servants who helped him by saying, ""Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean?'"

Difficult is not always better. Sometimes simple is all that is required, and we overlook it because it seems too simple. Jesus sent the 70 out with nothing as a way of showing us this. They did not go out with huge production crews and put on light shows and special effects or have fabulous choirs. They went in pairs with nothing but the clothes on their backs. No food, no change of clothes, no money.

It is that simple for us too. We don't need any special training or props. We just need to be honest about who we are, not be afraid to talk about why we go to church, and live a life that others admire and want to copy.

When you come to the end of your days, if you do this, you will hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And your ministry will carry on as people hear about you and the example you set. Fanny did not set out to be an inspiration. She just took the life she was given and used it to glorify God. Her name is written in heaven. Live the life you are given in a way that glorifies God and your name too will be written in heaven. It is as simple as that. And there, not only will the lion lie down with the lamb, but the wolf will be friends with the sheepdog.