

## “God’s Mission Has A Church”

Dr. D. Jay Losher

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Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 = God’s mission

**M**arge Carpenter has been a tireless promoter of God’s mission. She has gathered funny stories from around the world which she uses in her talks in churches. She asks: “Do you know how to tell how long missionaries have been in the field?”

“At first, if they find a fly in their water glass, they pour the whole thing out.

Later, finding a fly in their water glass, they pick it out, shrug and drink the water.

Later still, they find a fly in a water glass, they smile and say ‘Oh good! Soup!’”

Marge Carpenter says she hasn’t been to Seminary and so she doesn’t preach three point sermons. Instead she has just two points:

1. Wherever the church has been established, it is still there: China is a prime example.
2. The church is the only hope in much of the world.

These two represent our end of history. Let’s jump back to the beginning.

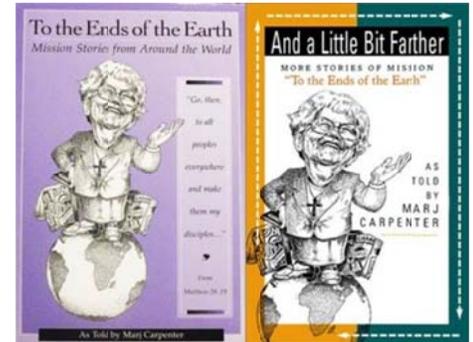
**E**arly on Jesus sent out disciples on the first recorded mission journeys ~ the first, it was just the 12. The second time, in our text today, Jesus sends out 70 followers. Both times pairs of disciples are sent out as Jesus’ opening act, ahead of him to the villages where he intends to go.



**“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few”**

Jesus tells them exactly what to do and precisely what to say:

**“cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”**



Repeating himself Jesus sends them off with these words ringing in their ears.

**“know this: the kingdom of God has come near.”**

The central, most important instruction of all these is: **“Travel Light.” “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals”**

The early church understood this implicitly: “travel light” meant “ultralight.” Clement of Alexandria in about the year 200 said we need to get rid of all the overweight luggage we bring with us into the realm of God:

“‘Carry not,’ said the Lord, ‘purse nor script nor shoes.’ ... We must, then, cast away the multitude of vessels, silver and gold drinking cups, and the crowd of domestics, receiving as we have done from the Instructor the fair and grave attendants, Self-help and Simplicity.”

God’s claim on us is total. All that we gain, and all we accomplish comes from God. Therefore “travel light.”

But just as we humans do, the institution Church can gain weight over time. It grows fat, even obese, so at some point our beloved Church can no longer move at all.

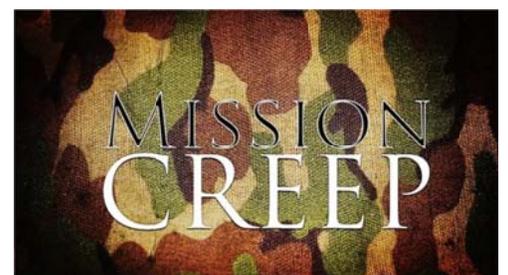


An example: we are sent by Jesus to proclaim and demonstrate God’s reign. But over time that message gets obscured by Session meetings, committee assignments, worship responsibilities, and CMR, stewardship and 4N dinners, and youth work, service to the community and the proclamation of salvation to humanity. Each important, all portions of the message, but still tending to supplant the central message itself.

There is another term for this inevitable widening of the Church’s waistline: “Mission creep.” “Mission creep” is a military term indicating the gradual shift, usually expansion, in the direction, goals and extent of a campaign. Failing to win swiftly on the original purpose can result in the almost imperceptible moving of the goalposts in an unconscious effort to find a victory somewhere, somehow.



Christ Sending Out the Seventy Disciples Two by Two by James Tissot



“Mission creep” exists in the church, especially in the church ~ but usually not in the expansion of the mission, but rather in its reduction. Long before the military took up the term, we had “*mission c-r-e-a-k*” ~ our gradual loss of vision, our incremental loss of enthusiasm for God’s mission.

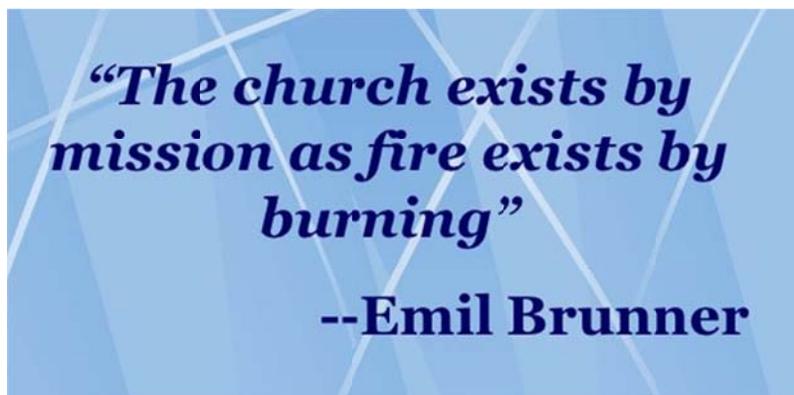
**M**ichael Kinnamon, a minister and missions pastor, cuts to the source of the dilemma better than anyone:

“Most Christians think God’s church has a mission. But in reality God’s church does not have a mission. Quite the opposite: *God’s mission has a church.*”



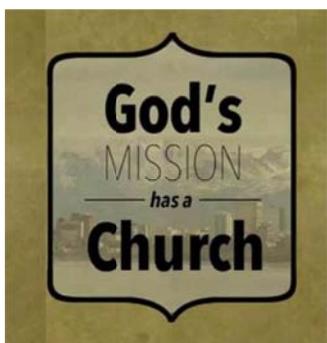
It is a question of ends and means. God’s mission is the end, the Church is merely the means. We invariably get it backwards making the institution of Church an end in itself. God’s mission is primary, not just primary, it is the only purpose for the Church.

Emil Brunner says it perfectly:



If the church loses its mission, thinks of itself as the end, it has already failed. It may appear successful, even become a mega-church, but it has failed. It falls into compromise, it chases after popularity, it makes decisions based on pleasing everyone, especially the big donors. It loses its soul. It ceases to exist as Christ’s church.

**G**od’s mission has a church! Our text makes explicit that Jesus did not found an institution but started a mission. At the very first Jesus gathered the disciples and sent them out fronting him ~ first to Israel, then into the entire world. Jesus tells us exactly what to do and precisely what to say:



**“Travel light. Eat with all who receive you. Cure the sick. Say to everyone, ‘The kingdom of God has come near.’”**

Returning, they had accomplished these and even more. They accomplished so much, they astounded themselves.

**G**od’s mission has a church. God’s mission evolved into an institution; and the church, at first so focused on its mission, so radical, so visionary; yet the Bride of Christ over time eventually comes to act just like every other human institution.

Our denominations and congregations are in many ways at the later stages of bloat and stagnation. Few have a clear, unequivocal passion for Jesus’ mission mandate. If a church grows without mission growth, the growth is nothing, means nothing for God or God’s community. If a church experiences growth in mission, then God can use that church ~ is using that church!

There is always hope ~ hope for a re-envisioning, a re-conversion, a renewal, for a new Reformation. Since God’s mission has a church, revitalization of the church necessarily means recovery of our core mission.

**D**ietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor and theologian on the fast track in Germany when Hitler came to power. He escaped to the US to take up an invitation from Union Theology Seminary in New York. He was well received there and found a safe haven far from the insanity facing his homeland.



Yet Bonhoeffer was torn between the safety of New York and the increasing struggle of the German churches. As he sought discernment in what he was to do, a phrase caught his attention from one of Paul’s letters. Paul says to Timothy, “Come before winter.”<sup>2</sup>

Bonhoeffer knew this was a word from God. A peace came over him, the peace that comes from doing what you know God wants you to do. In a few days, he was on a ship returning to Germany to almost certain death.<sup>3</sup> He travelled light. He lived in God’s realm. Bonhoeffer was sent.

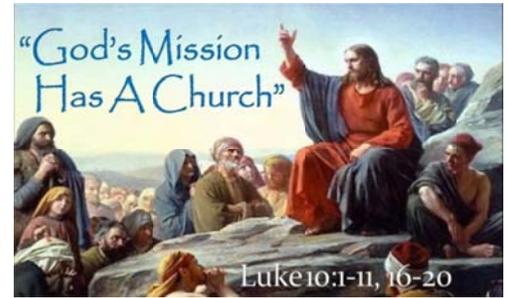
It may not seem like much, but that original sending out of 70 has had far reaching effect. Marge Carpenter's two points:

1. Wherever the church has been established, it is still there.
2. The church is the only hope in much of the world.

An imperishable and incomparable message has been entrusted to us ~ a message of hope and love to a moribund world ~ a message which has the power to change lives, transform societies and change even us.

And this pearl beyond price ~ this invaluable Gospel ~ we are charged with giving it away. Sent out by two's with "no purse nor script nor sandals;" sent out to heal and proclaim, to demonstrate that God's realm has arrived.

God's mission has a church. And let it begin with us.



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<sup>1</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*

<sup>2</sup> II Timothy 4:21

<sup>3</sup> William H. Willimon, *Pulpit Resource* July 7, 2007, p. 8