**Bible Reflection: Luke 10:1-12**

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When I read the Gospels, I often ask myself the following question: How is it possible for a small group of disciples, most of whom were ordinary fishermen (12 or even 70), several women, relatives and friends of Jesus Christ to spread the gospel all over the world? What made them to be fearless preachers and missionaries and to endure suffering, persecutions and beating, yet their faith not only changed the entire Roman Empire but transformed the world as well? Today Christianity is the most numerous religion in the world, with the greatest number of followers (over 2.2 billion), and there is no power to stop it from spreading. St. Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit is the One who has given them power and He Himself is the One who is working through His followers and their lives to change the world: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit descends upon you; And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and Samaria, and even unto the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8).

In Luke 10, Jesus appointed seventy men and sent them forward two by two in every city and place, where He Himself would go and visit on His way to Jerusalem. It seems their task was to prepare the way for Him to proclaim peace, and tell people that "the kingdom of God is near."

We will look very briefly at the instructions the Lord gave them before they left, as they contain principles that are valid and applicable to us today. Some of these principles can be summarized in the following way:

1. Jesus sent His disciples two by two to be a sufficient number of witnesses. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (2 Corinthians 13:1).

2. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. The mission field is huge and yet the workers are few. The situation has not changed much in the 21st century. The servant must continually pray to God to send workers to His harvest (verse 2). The need for servants is always greater than their number. Besides that, when we pray for workers, we ourselves must be ready to go to the field. Note that immediately after that commandment, "pray" Jesus utters another command, and it is: "go" (verse 3).

3. Jesus sends His disciples into a hostile world where they will be like "lambs in the midst of wolves." The world will not welcome them with honor. They will be prosecuted and even killed. Jesus knows who is His enemy, He knows who is "the prince of this world". We live in a fallen world, which is hostile to God. How can sheep converse with wolves? How it comes that a wild beast can ever be at peace with a sheep? How then does He command the holy apostles, who are guileless men, sheep (if we may say so), to seek the company of wolves, and go to them of their own accord? Is not the danger evident? Are they not set as a ready prey for their attacks? Can a sheep prevail over a wolf? Yes, she can. Because He says, that He is our Shepherd. He is with us to help us, and deliver us from all evil. He can tame the savage beasts; He changes wolves into sheep; He makes the persecutors become the helpers of the persecuted: and those who wrong His ministers, He makes them sharers in His pious designs. For He is the One who makes and unmakes all things, and there is nothing that can resist His will.

4. Personal conveniences are not allowed (verse 4): “Do not take a purse or bag or sandals...”. Although they should not carry anything with themselves, they still have a lot to give and they can enrich the people who accept them. They are completely defenseless and dependent on God and on the mercy of people. If they have enough money to cover their needs, they will rely on themselves and on their capabilities. This leads us to another promise given to the disciples: “… for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:32b-33.)

5. “…and do not greet anyone on the road…”. Workers must pursue their goal. They should be focused on their mission. They must have clear priorities, and they must not be easily distracted. The way people greet each other in the Middle East differs from the hectic way of life today. In Bulgaria and Turkey there is a saying: *If one has an urgent job, they will end up drinking their coffee by noon.*

6. “When you enter a house, first say, “Peace to this house!” Promoting God’s peace is their primary goal. They go to deliver a message of peace and forgiveness. And those who reject that peace, which has been offered to them, they will not be able to enjoy it.

7. The disciples must not leave the house where they first were offered a shelter. Moving from house to house can be interpreted as seeking greater conveniences, while they need to live simply and be happy with what is being offered to them. The servants of the Lord deserve their salary. (verse 7)

8. Both individuals as well as communities (or towns) also have to decide to accept or reject Jesus (verses 8 to 11). If a city accepts the message, the disciples have to remain and preach there, accept people’s hospitality and bring them blessings. In cities where the messengers of the Lord are received, they heal the sick. When God performs a miracle through them, it does not happen for the sake of the miracles themselves, but the message is that the kingdom of God is near (verse 9) Jesus comes to the people in this city – this is an opportunity for salvation, a time when people must make a decision.

9. On the other hand, if people in a city refuse to accept them, they have to leave. Through the symbolic gesture of publicly tapping the dust of the city from their feet, they had to demonstrate the significance and consequences of rejecting the Savior. People had to understand that they had an opportunity for salvation – the kingdom of God approached them. The choice and the verdict remain on them.

If I have to summarize briefly the most important thing about me for this passage, it is: The harvest is abundant and the workers are few. Pray to the Master of the Harvest to send workers to go, two by two, don’t worry, trust God, and proclaim His peace and that the kingdom of God has come near.

How can we fulfill this mission today? I will offer you several different ways that I have learned from personal experience.

1. My son Rady is a missionary in Africa. A young man at the age of 20 heard and responded to the call of God in his life, showing courage and determination. God had already put into his heart an adventurous spirit to travel and explore and He had already used him to share the Good news to his friends, peers, classmates, and colleagues. The church had recognized his gift of an evangelist no matter that he is only 20 years old, and he set out to show God’s peace, love and kingdom to the people in Africa. The lost children and people in Africa now just need to hear the simple truths of the Bible that: Only He is the One who gives peace and eternal live. Our mission is to preach about God’s peace and proclaim that God’s kingdom is near.

It's simple, isn’t it? We want to say to the Lord: Lord, send me! Or, Here I am, I am Yours, use Me.

We sing a favorite song which says: “I am the instrument of God's glory. God use me, and send me!” Perhaps it is harder to trust God and go.

In the Word, God has not promised us a victorious life without any problems, neither a life always on the rise, but He has told us that there will be difficulties, and trials. However He is always with us, He is our Deliverer, Provider, Jehovah-Ire, God with us, Comforter ...

We can lead a victorious life only if we live in dependence of God. People normally connect victory with success: they do not connect it with stumbling and falling, neither with making mistakes. According to world standards, successful people are inclined to walk on their own ways, forgetting about God. However, we learn to rely on God through problems and failures, weakness and emptiness.

True dependence is not simply to ask God to bless what we have decided to do, but to come to God with an open heart and invite Him to put His desires in us. Then He can give us dreams that may even look unachievable to us, and so we will begin our journey and we will learn to trust in Him completely. We will learn to lean on Him step by step. This is the path of faith. Not a path of constant success, but a path of many defeats, each of which is crowned with growth, supported by an increasing trust in Him. We can enjoy the blessing of a victorious life by deepening in God. For we live by faith, not by sight. What do you need – you need to trust and depend on God. God takes care. (Psalm 34: 17-18; 2 Corinthians 5: 7; Isaiah 34:17-18; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Matthew 6:25-28).

2. Father Ivan from the village of Novi Han

Not everyone will go to Africa. What can we do for the people around us where we live?  
Father Ivan of Novi Han is a priest in the Eastern Orthodox Church who takes care of homeless and poor children and orphans. He opened the door of the parish church he was serving in and hosted children of that area. Building of "St. Nikolay" orphanage was started in 1988 in the courtyard of the Holy Trinity Church in the village.

The construction started with 240 EURO. From the very beginning, until now, the home is supported and equipped only with voluntary aids and donations. No aid is sought from the state or church institutions.

For over 20 years, more than 900 people have found shelter, warm food and clothing. Here people in need live until they are settled. Besides the house in the village of Novi Han, some of the families are accommodated in the colony of family houses in the nearby village of Yakimovo.

Father Ivan's ambition is to provide the people in the two villages not only with temporary shelter, but also with real homes. He is training them to take care of their needs in life by working in the yards and the available agricultural land.

As of November, 2016 in the houses in two villages there are 310 people that live there, and 170 of them are children (from babies, that were born there to children up to age of 18). The little children go to kindergarten, and the older children go to school. Mothers in the homes take care of the babies.

Also a medical center is being built, with a dentist's office and a doctor’s room for internal diseases. It is designed to serve the needs of socially disadvantaged people who are unable to pay for the medical service. Family homes are built too, where the children will live and be able to raise their families there.

Father Ivan said: “Here in the village of Novi Han I found a church with a big yard, which was completely empty, and there was no even a fence, and so I decided that I can accomplish my pledge and began the work .... Many years ago, I made a vow that I would raise up children here; I would baptize them and marry them here. Everybody was telling me that I was crazy and that nothing would happen because there was no money. But now things started to happen with God's help and I am very excited because today one of my dreams comes true. Let there be many more weddings by God’s will. I promise to help these children to the end of my life! I am grateful to all who are helping us! May God bless you to succeed even more, so that you can help those in need! "

An elderly man of God serves the Lord just by starting with what he has. God is faithful and generous to supply. There is no one who has given his own to the Lord and God has not blessed him or her.

<https://www.facebook.com/MoataKauzaEPomosZaDomaNaOtecIvan/>

3. Maybe not all of us will open an orphanage, but each of us takes some position. Have you ever looked at your workplace as a missionary field where God can use you? Maybe God prepares theologians, doctors, scientists, ministers to whom He has given gifts and talents for a time like it is now. Maybe you are church leaders or participate in various ministries. Do you have young people to whom you share your experience? We all live in and are a part of a modern society. Are we interested in the contemporary issues that are relevant and important to all people? Does the church have a position and opinion about them?

In the fields of genetic engineering, the moral crisis in our society is evident with the disintegration of the family as an institution, the raise of homosexuality and the influx of refugees. We have something to say to modern society and we have the values ​​and principles on which we can teach our society and our children.

For 10 years I have been working in the field of protection of human rights and religious freedom. 4 years ago I finished my dissertation. It is a study on human rights and how we can use this modern concept as a platform for discussions among Christians and the society. It is also a presentation on how the Orthodox tradition can enrich the concept of human rights.

I think that human rights speak a universal international language which allows all religious groups to express their convictions, to determine their own views, and to express their disapproval when introducing sets of rights contradict their views. The religious traditions can contribute to the development of the human rights concept. This is the way to reach a balance between on the one extreme, placing the human rights concept in the secular sphere and thus depriving the concept of the critical assessment of the faith communities, and on the other extreme, defining rights as a narrowly religious tradition. Using the language of human rights allows representatives of all religious creeds, as well as atheists, to take part in the dialogue and thus to reach a consensus of how to live together in a society, protecting the rights not only of individuals but also of communities. If we want to learn to accept and understand one another and live together in a society, we need the universal language of human rights in order to express and protect our faiths and views.

The human rights concept, which regulates freedom of speech, thought, conscience and religion, creates the prerequisites for open dialogue and free competition in the search for truth and authentic Christian testimony. The language of human rights provides the churches with an opportunity to enter into dialogue with the world on contemporary issues without making it necessary for them to change or step back from their faith and convictions.

Human rights language bridges and combines the religious foundations of morality and the aspirations of the modern society. Through it, biblical messages can be presented and understood even by people who do not belong to a church. The concept of human rights is a bridge between cultures, a language for the conversations between them, a way to preserve peace. Through human rights the principles of peace, justice and solidarity are being fulfilled in every community.

It is the church that is called to educate and to defend or stand up for the moral values in society. International legislation on human rights does not hinder this process, but rather offers opportunities to the church to educate and defend its positions. Although the secular character of human rights legislation should be taken into account, it is these laws that allow freedom of religion, of speech, and of expression so that the church can freely present to the society its morality and ethical norms. The church can help define the parameters of the social order by expressing its consent and disagreement. In the contemporary pluralistic society, the church is free to take a position in public on topical issues, to educate and lift up moral standards, to be “salt and light”. Both laws and a moral system of values are important for the development of society.

In present days the church is free to fulfill its mission and social role. The protection of human rights allows the church to lead humankind towards salvation and deification. This is not, however, a goal of human rights. Although evil is increasing in the world, the church will never accept and agree with sin, even if it is legally regulated. By expressing and defending its clear and firm position to the society, the church enables people to make their own choice.

It is important for Christians to understand human rights. Inter-Christian dialogue on key issues regarding human rights shows the active presence of Christians in the contemporary world. The role of churches in society and their voice on socially important issues are significant for the maintenance of equality, justice, morality and peace.

**Conclusion**: And so,…if you are a young man or a woman and God calls you to be His servant on the mission field, do not be afraid to go. God is with you. If we have accumulated years, wisdom and experience, certainly we have something to give. Do you have people to share your experience with? We can build people around us and help those who are in need.

The need of love and care for marginal groups in society is increasing every day. If some of us are scientists, or if we work in some scientific field, we can use the knowledge we have gained to provoke people's thinking, stand up, go, and shine. If some of us have the gift to be a caregiver, a counselor and if we have a heart for pastoral care, we can love and give comfort to men, women and children, to victims of human trafficking, or to help people who have experienced violence, or we can work with marginal groups in society, we must go. We can show them the love of God and give them comfort. In the passage Luke 10:1-14, Jesus sent them in twos. We have to pray for a co-worker, or if we already have one, we can just go.

Go, the harvest is abundant, the workers are few.