

“Meeting Jesus on the Corner of Faith and Life”

Acts 13:1-12; Luke 10:1-3a, 16-20

1st Presbyterian Church of Sharon

July 26, 2026-Youth Mission Trip Sunday

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I. Introduction

My life got better, and the world got more interesting, with the addition of a bird feeder in my backyard a few years ago. I knew I needed to slow down. I knew I needed to pay better attention to “right now.” And I knew I enjoyed the beauty and wonder of nature. So I thought, “Why not try a bird feeder?”

So I put one up. I went down to the Birdwatchers Store just outside Slippery Rock to get the right one. And the people there helped me get the right seed. It took a little experimenting. I had to figure out how to keep the squirrels, chipmunks, and deer out of it. And birds are messy eaters, so I had to figure out how to catch the seed that falls so it doesn’t grow into a jungle under the feeder. But before long I had it set up.

Now I just need to keep seeds in the feeders. I added a flat tray for the larger birds. And a special feeder for just goldfinch. I watch them from my dining room table during breakfast, and from my patio during the evening. I even got some binoculars to see distant birds in the trees. I can identify most of the birds that come by. And I’ve learned a few of their songs. Some evenings when it’s quiet, I’ll play a birdsong on my phone and see if it will call any birds in. It’s worked a couple of times.

Of course I get plenty of sparrows. But I also get Gold Finches and House Finches. I get Chickadees and Cardinals and a few Eastern Bluebirds. Chipping Sparrows are regular visitors. I like them; though they are small they are bold. Once in a while I get a Downy Woodpecker and a Tufted Titmouse and a Bluejay. And once I got a Rose Breasted Grosbeak.

Here’s the point that I think about; the birds were always there. I just needed something like a feeder and choosing to pay attention to see them. And so that makes me wonder, “what else am I missing?” The world is big and wonderful.

Maybe it’s also like living through tens of thousands of sunsets. And then the beauty of one just catches your attention and you realize what you’ve been missing. Or maybe it’s like just waving to your neighbors but not really knowing any of them. And then one morning a neighbor helps you when your car battery is dead, and you realize for the first time you have great neighbors. Or maybe it’s like knowing for years there are free summer concerts at Buhl Park on Wednesday and Sunday evenings. But then you go to one and realize for the first time what a gift

the concerts are to the community. All of this makes me wonder about the beauty of life and what I might be missing.

Today is Youth Mission Trip Sunday. So we want to think a little about mission. Why share in mission? Why do mission? Why go on mission trips? At its worst the Church did mission as part of conquest. Missionaries were sent with explorers and soldiers. Different people and cultures faced the choice of convert or die. That's a sad and tragic mission history.

Another is to believe so that you might go to heaven. A lot of faithful Christians have this position. It's basically this: we do mission so people who don't believe in Jesus will believe in Jesus and go to heaven when they die. I suppose that's ok. There are some verses in the Bible that fit that. But it seems like a small view of salvation that's all about conversion and heaven. I believe Christian faith and God's grace is bigger than that.

So what if mission is more like the birdfeeder, sunset, neighbors, and concert stories? What if mission is about discovering what God is already doing all around us? What if mission is about seeing what we were missing, and discovering the beauty and wonder of life and faith and God? What if mission is about helping people experience the God "who so loves the world" in this life and the next? Now I find that beautiful and interesting.

II. Biblical Texts and Brief Exegesis

The biblical texts today are stories about mission. The first is in Luke 10. It's called the "mission of the 70." In Matthew and Mark, the story is told with just the 12 disciples going out before Jesus. But here in Luke it's 70, and the 70 represent the coming mission of the early church to all nations. Luke wants us to understand that the mission of the church began with Jesus.

In the story the 70 are given power and authority to go before Jesus. It has the feel of a type of royal announcement that the Messiah King and the kingdom of God are coming, so get ready. It also has an "end times" or eschatological" feel as the long-awaited Savior and salvation of God are breaking forth in life now. It's the mission announcement that the grace and power of God in Jesus Christ is happening all around. Pay attention. And believe. Don't miss it.

The report when the 70 return is interesting. Specifically, the powers of evil and Satan are overcome. People held captive by demonic possession have been freed. There is new life. The power of God's kingdom and Savior have begun to come into the world. Evil powers are overcome, which could include possession, hunger, loneliness, slavery, addictions, and injustice. Different types of evil enslave all sorts of different people. The mission begun by the 70 will continue in the church. So pay attention to what's happening all around you.

The second reading is from Acts 13:1-3. **(Read Acts 13:1-3)**

The risen Christ's command in Acts 1:8 gives us the outline of the book of Acts: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And so it has been. The small group of Jewish Christians has grown. Empowered by the Spirit, the belief in Christ has crossed gender, economic, race, cultural, and social status lines. By Acts 13 the early Church increasingly includes non-Jews and the center of the Church is moving from Jerusalem to Antioch. The "mission of the 70" is now becoming much more. Belief in Jesus and the kingdom of God is spreading across the Roman Empire.

Acts will tell the story of Paul's three missionary journeys. The text in Acts 13 is the beginning of the first journey. The mention of the leaders of the church in Antioch has an international feel: Barnabus was a Jew, Simeon who was called Niger may have been African, Lucius was from Cyrene, Manaen may have been a Greek who worked as a political official in Herod Antipas' court, and Saul, also called Paul, was a Jew, rabbi, and Roman citizen.

As the book of Acts tells the story of the early church, it is always clear that the message of Jesus Christ and the coming of God's kingdom is only spread by the power of God's Holy Spirit working in faithful people. And so it is here. Prompted in worship by the Holy Spirit, Barnabus and Saul are set apart for a mission journey. The message of God's grace and power for all people is bigger than Antioch. And so Barnabus and Saul will go with the prayers and support of their friends in Antioch. And like the mission of the 70, they will face evil powers, unbelief, and opposition. But some will believe. And they will begin to live new ways in salvation and the kingdom of God. They will pay attention to the grace and power of God that was already all around them. And they will experience the faith, hope, and love they had missed in their lives before.

III. Brief Theological Reflection

So why do we share in God's mission in the world? Why do we have a Block Party for neighbors on the corner of 5th and Fullerton? Why do we help feed hungry kids through the Mercer County Food Bank? Why do we host a summer program for at-risk teenagers? Why do we make room for a Sharon Head Start program? Why do we support Joshua's Haven homeless shelter? Why do I put gas in the tank of the van of a stranded family, or give a \$50 food voucher to a grandma and two grandchildren whose cupboards are bare? Why do we send teenagers and adults on a mission trip today? I believe we do these missions, and much more, because we believe that Jesus is the Christ who brings the grace and power of God in the kingdom of God here and now. We do mission because we want people to hear and experience the kingdom of God that is all around us. We do mission because we don't want people to miss it. We do mission, like me feeding the birds, to remind ourselves of the beauty and wonder of the salvation of God here and now. We do mission because we believe our mission statement: Meeting Jesus on the Corner of Faith and Life.

More than a generation ago, Scottish preacher George McCleod was at the Salisbury Cathedral to preach at a worship service. Arriving early, he wandered around the majestic cathedral admiring its stone and stained glass and woodwork.

When he came to one of those beautiful windows he stopped and looked at it. On the bottom frame of the window it said, “Glory to God in the highest.” But as he looked closer, he noticed that the “e” had dropped out of “highest.” So what it really said in fact was “Glory to God in the high st.” And “high street” in Scotland means “main street.”

So right then a moment of inspiration happened. Certainly the beauty of the cathedral proclaimed the glory of God. But even more McCleod realized that God is not held captive by the stone, glass, and wood of the cathedral. Rather God is also out on “high street,” out on all the “main streets” of life. With a God “who so loves the world,” that God could be nowhere else. And so right then McCleod changed the sermon he was to preach at Salisbury Cathedral and called it “High Street.”

So why do we do mission? We do mission because we believe the mission of the 70 continues and we want to be part of it. We do mission because we are nudged by the Holy Spirit. We do mission because we believe the grace and power of God are already out on “high street.” And we do mission to remind ourselves that “God does so love this world.”