

Title: The small world of guarding turf  
Text: Luke 9.49-50  
Theme: sharing the work, sharing the glory  
Series: Luke  
Prop Stmtnt: Spreading the work is the mission.

At Christmas we celebrate the advent (coming) of Christ to the earth. Our God came to us, for us and became one of us. Why? He came to offer up his perfect life as a perfect sacrifice to atone for our sins. Why? So that every person who trusts in Christ alone will be forgiven and declared righteous by God. Why? So that at the end of this life we will live forever with God. Why? Because God has chosen to make his glory known and enjoyed by us. Creation is God going public with his joy and glory. Redemption is God securing a people to enjoy that joy and glory forever. God created us that he might invite us and draw us into a relationship that is so perfect, so trusting, so delightful and so meaningful that his followers are going to rule and reign with him. Salvation is God bringing us into his palace in order to share his authority and kingdom with us. Our God is not a stingy God. He is generous. He is not turf or territorial. He shares it all with us. As followers of Christ, what should our following look like? What is Jesus doing with the disciples? He is sharing the work in order to share the glory.

I was doing a two-week teaching trip for pastors in another country one time, when on a walk in the city, I came upon a seminary that was already there and operational. When I investigated, I found out that it was a good seminary. Then I started asking why are we/I going through all of this effort to go to this city and train pastors when this is already in place? It made no sense to me. I found out the reason. That seminary was operated by a different organization than the one that requested and arranged for me to go. Two different organizations that were in the same exact location doing the exact same thing. The one did not want me to know about the other, because then we might not provide funding to this one if we knew about that one.

Some of you have worked with people who refuse to collaborate. It may be out of fear of losing status or losing esteem. It may be out of fear of someone else stealing their work. Perhaps they were burned before. It may be driven by a sense of perfectionism. No one can do it like me, so I am not going to let anyone have the passwords to the social media accounts, the management software or documents. People like that create all sorts of bottlenecks for projects and timelines. And while that is exasperating, we are not all that surprised when stuff like this happens in life. But when it happens among the people of God, it betrays at the very least, a failure to understand the heart of our mission.

Read Text:

Repeatedly Jesus lays it out that he is the King of the upside-down kingdom. He is not the King you would expect and his kingdom does not operate the way that earthly kingdoms do. We are used to insecure leaders who use others to advance themselves, who try to suck in power and attention in order to control any who may be a threat. We are used to leaders being vengeful and turf. And yet, it is so true how much more can be accomplished when the people involved

don't care who gets the credit. But, try finding people like that. It's rather difficult finding people who don't care about getting credit. Jesus is laying out the values of his kingdom and John and the disciples reveal that they haven't yet connected the dots. But it appears that they are trying to. Notice how it begins.

*"John answered...."* Jesus had just placed a child in front of them who represented the overlooked and unimportant and challenged them to receive the *"least among you."* You are to intentionally look to welcome all people. That means that you are to care for them. John then pipes up and says that there was this guy who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus and they *"tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us."* The *"we"* in the phrase *"we tried to stop him"* is referring to the disciples. Therefore, the *"us"* in the phrase, *"he does not follow with us."* Is also a reference to the disciples. John is saying that since he wasn't one of the 12 disciples, we tried to get him to stop using your name, as if only the 12 were allowed to minister in the name of Jesus. John and the rest were displaying a common assumption.

### 1. **Earthly leadership focuses on guarding turf.** (49)

This chapter begins with Jesus giving authority to the disciples to cast out demons when they went on their short-term mission trip. Now they come across someone who is not in the 12, but who is obviously convinced of the power of Christ and this guy is casting out demons in the name of Christ. So, they try to get him to stop. The verb tense sounds like this was something that happened a few times. They heard about it, warned him to stop and he kept doing it, they told him again to quit, and he wouldn't quit. That's the sense of the text.

But wait a minute. It's not like this guy had opened a cannabis store and was selling "Jesus weed." In fact, the text does not say that he was just trying to cast demons out. He was actually casting out demons. Luke also wrote the book of Acts. In Acts 19, he tells the story of some traveling exorcists who went around, and (probably) for a fee would deal with the underworld and cast out demons. People who have been under demonic oppression or possession are often completely desperate to be rid of them and can be at the mercy of shady characters who claim that they can traffic in this sort of thing. In Acts 19, there were 7 brothers who claimed to be exorcists and they were in Ephesus when they became aware of the ministry of the apostle Paul. So, they tried his "magic." V.13 says that they *"undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.'" The text says that the evil spirit responded by saying, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"* At that point, the man who was possessed by the evil spirit assaulted these 7 guys and beat them up badly. Those guys were clearly frauds and were trying to use the name of Jesus like a magic charm. That is not what is going on here in Luke 9.

This man was casting out demons (plural). He was successfully helping people get rid of the evil spirits that were destroying their lives. He was helping people recover their lives and take them back from the Evil One in order that they may become followers of Christ. This man knew that Jesus was powerful, he believed Jesus so much that he was willing, armed only with Jesus, to face the darkness head on and help rescue people from it.

We understand the need for discernment. But just because you and I may not have heard about the person and therefore, know how they came to be in this position of influence, unless they are in violation of the Word of God, we should not assume the worst. In fact, if God is clearly using this person to dismantle the kingdom of darkness and spread the fame of Christ, we should look for ways to lock arms and encourage them. This person is clearly a threat to Satan. So, why do the disciples try so hard to stop him? *“He does not follow with us.”*

He is not in our group. Small is the heart that is focused on guarding turf. And we can all get really turfy. Why are we so turfy? It is pride. I have a “Pride evaluation guide” that a friend of mine put together and sent to me. The guide is made up of 28 questions. It is not a whole lot of fun to go through since it reveals so many areas of pride. One of the questions in the guide is: “Do you get jealous when others are praised and noticed, and you aren’t?” Related to that would be, “Do you get jealous or threatened when someone is able to do as good of a job as you, or perhaps better?”

Did John say this because he is fishing for a compliment? Is he letting Jesus know that we were guarding your reputation. We were protecting the integrity of the team. If so, then he would expect Jesus to pat him on the back. I’m not sure that is what is going on. John is the one who volunteered to tell on himself and the others. And John says it in response to what Jesus just said about receiving those whom you would be tempted to overlook and ignore. It seems to me that John is raising this issue because he is now wondering if he and the others did the right thing. John may be questioning his own actions. If that is the case, John is demonstrating some humility by recognizing that he and the others did not handle this well. I think this is case because while Jesus corrects him, Jesus does not rebuke him. Jesus rebukes when it is needed (next week), but here he instructs. Once again, Jesus reveals just how big his heart is.

## **2. The Kingdom of Christ focuses on sharing turf. (50)**

*“Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him, because he who is not against you is for you.’”*

The title of this sermon is, the small world of guarding turf. Our posture should be one of looking to invite others, share with others, include others, equip others, encourage others, and give space to others to learn and grow. The church has too often failed to take the call of Christ in this matter to heart. Instead of living generously and big-hearted we fight over turf. When that happens, the results have been ugly. One of the ugly expressions of that today are the many “discernment bloggers” or “watchblogs.” Claiming to help people not be duped by exposing errors, heresy and hypocrites, so many are just mean, angry, divisive and are an ugly portrait of error and hypocrisy. They feed off of bad news in order to generate views which means that bad news is good for their business. I agree with the need to be discerning, starting with our need to be discerning of the toxic effect of discernment bloggers. Beloved, be discerning. Be discerning of those who claim, in the name of discernment try to suck you into the dark world of constantly finding fault. They promote this arrogance that says, “I am the final authority. If everyone were like me or like my ministry then the world would right, but of course

there is no one else like me or like my ministry. So, you need me to tell you what is wrong with everyone else.” Now, if we looked hard enough, would we like find something wrong with this guy who was casting out demons? Maybe. Likely. But that doesn’t make him our enemy. We have a serious enemy and when we treat friends like enemies, then we are letting the real enemy win. By tearing others down, we think that we look better by comparison. What a blatant denial of 2 Corinthians 10.12.

Why do we fight over turf? By turf I mean our rights, reputation, and resources.

- We don’t realize that already we have it all.
- We don’t realize the reality of our union with Christ.
- We don’t realize the nature of the genuine family of God.
- We don’t realize the mission we are on.
- We don’t realize the heart of our Savior and the heart of God the Father.
- We don’t realize the means by which the gospel ministry is advanced.

If we did a study of power throughout the Bible, we would see this idea played out so many times. God shares his authority with us. He teaches us, equips us, uses us, and empowers us so that we will join him on his mission to rule over all. It starts in the Garden of Eden where God shares his authority with Adam who names, rules over and is called to, along with his wife Eve to subdue their world (the garden) and to spread its borders. Moses shares his authority with 70 elders for the benefit of Israel. Now in the NT, Jesus shares his authority with his disciples, by giving them the keys to the kingdom, which they in turn give to the local churches. Churches are to be led by a plurality of elders whose mission is to build up the body of Christ, not only for the work of the ministry in the church, but to the end that every member of the church is prepared to reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2.12). That is why this issue is such a big deal.

Look at v.51. The ministry of Jesus pivots right here. Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” where he is going to go to die, then be resurrected and then, 40 days later, ascend. His life and ministry on this earth is rapidly coming to the end. He is going to be gone and these guys are going to be charged with taking over and carrying on. We need to hear what Jesus says with that sense of urgency and importance. Jesus charges these guys with forming the New Covenant people of God. The mission of the church is to display the gospel. The heart of the gospel is our generous God giving us a King and Savior who died that we might be forgiven, justified, adopted into his family and made part of his kingdom in order to rule and reign with him forever. The mission of God, or the plan of God is massive! It includes people from every tribe, language and nation. If we are obsessed with guarding turf, we will fail at our job. That does not mean that we compromise the truth or water down the gospel, because if we did that we would fail at our job as well. But we cannot display the heart of God if we have a posture that is always looking for reasons to find fault instead of reasons to encourage.

My conclusion is earlier than normal because it is going to be longer than usual. I want to ask you a few heart kind of questions and then tease out a few more areas of application.

Questions to ask ourselves:

- 1) Do I tend to be more critical or encouraging? Do I tend to look for reasons to say no or for reasons to say yes?

If I tend to be critical, then I need to evaluate my posture and realize that I may be failing to embrace Christ's charge. Of course, I tend to be encouraging, I should recognize that I may need to be careful that I just don't assume that everything is right either.

- 2) Do the people around me feel acknowledged, loved, appreciated, and encouraged or do I always have to end every sentence with "but you could have done this?"

One of the commands that Paul gives to dads is, do not exasperate your kids. When your kids or the people around you feel as if you are going to trump every card they try to play, they will see no reason to even try. If you are impossible to please, that says way more about your insecurities than it does about you being the standard. If you are impossible to please, do not fool yourself, you are not the standard. You are a misrepresentation of the standard.

- 3) Do I tend to be a giver or a hoarder? I don't just mean with stuff. I mean, do I display a generosity towards others or a suspicion that guards my heart, my time, and other resources.

In order for this mantra of Christ to be displayed in our lives and church, there are two things that have to be ongoing. There has to be a commitment to share and there has to be a commitment to share. That sounds like I just said the same thing. I did, but it is from two points of view. There has to be a commitment on the part of leaders to share and there has to be a commitment on the part of everyone else to embrace what is being shared. Following Christ means to share in the mission of Christ. He shares the work in order to share in the glory. Sharing in his mission is sharing the mission of the church. Too much of our mission as a church is carried by too few of our members. You have a group of leaders who love to share this mission and bend over backwards to give you information and invite you into learning what is going on and why. Trying to get some of you to even attend a members meeting, or serve is like pulling teeth. What makes you think that you are going to be ready to reign with Christ if you are unwilling to pull your weight? Beloved, this no game. This is the mission. We don't do it perfectly, but we certainly try really hard to do it right. Don't think small. If you try to protect your turf, your safe little world, your comforts and conveniences, then you will find your world and your heart getting smaller and smaller.

Areas of application:

- 1) Are there some people in my life that I could intentionally disciple, mentor, train, encourage, or just share my life with?

Kids, younger siblings, younger students, grandkids, new believers, young dads or moms, etc.

- 2) Ask your spouse or others close to you if they feel like you are impossible to please. If so, what steps can you take to work on this?
- 3) If you view God as being impossible to please, how does this command of Christ challenge that view?