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Luke 10:19-31

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Long before Tom Cruise began starring in the Mission Impossible movies,

- the original Mission Impossible television show
 - captured imaginations through the unbelievable tricks they used
 - to accomplish their missions - -
 - and the unusual way that each show began.
- A secret tape recorder would be retrieved,
 - the leader of the group would turn it on and hear - -
 - “Good Morning, Mr. Phelps.
 - Your mission, should you chose to accept is to -
 - capture, destroy, steal something - -
 - and as always should you or any of your IM force
 - be caught or killed,
 - the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions."
 - From there -
 - the tape would self destruct -
 - and the team would get started
 - carrying out
 - whatever mission they had been given.
 - Each week brought a new mission.
 - Each week was a new location.

- Each week offered a new set of challenges.
- Each week there was a chance to use people's gifts and talents
 - to overcome an impossible problem, -
 - to accomplish an impossible mission. -
- To the best of my knowledge,
 - the team never listened to the message and said,
 - you know what -
 - I don't think that this is a mission we can
 - accomplish. -
- In each case,
 - when presented with a challenge,
 - the team embraced the opportunity that was before them.
- And while we might be tempted to think, -
 - well - of course they accepted the challenge -
 - if they turned down a mission,
 - there wouldn't be a show or movie to watch,
- but I was reminded again this week,
 - that people not only accept impossible missions on tv,
 - but in communities all around the globe,
 - people take on "impossible missions"
 - all the time. -
- There are people using their gifts and talents
 - to push back against racism, oppression and violence. -

- There are people using their gifts and talents
 - to try and feed the hungry and help refugees. -
- There are people using their gifts and talents
 - to try and bring peace to a hurting world
 - and unity to our divided nation. - -
- These are just a few of the impossible missions
 - that people take on everyday. - - -
 - The scale of the problem is so great,
 - the odds of success so daunting,
 - that the mission feels impossible, -
 - and yet -
 - just like the impossible mission force -
 - people accept these challenges
 - on a daily basis. - -
- All of which makes me wonder, -
 - if those seventy
 - that Jesus sent out in teams of two all those years ago
 - felt like they were heading out on an impossible mission of their own.
 - Jesus doesn't exactly describe a week of fun and games
 - as he outlines their mission.
 - He doesn't explicitly say
 - 'If you are killed or captured,
 - we'll disavow you,'

- but it would be easy to confuse
- the instructions with the anonymous voice on the tape
- Here's your mission,
- should you chose to accept it. - -
- "The harvest plentiful,
- but the labors are few." - (Luke 10:2)
- In other words, -
- - there is lots to do
- and not many people to do it.
- And not only that, but it's going to be dangerous. - -
- "I am sending you out like lambs
- into the midst of the wolves." (Luke 10:3)
- And don't forget,
- time is of the essence,
- travel light and move quickly, - -
- "Carry no bag, no purse, no sandals and
- greet no one on the way." - -
- (Luke 10:4)
- Add in a self-destructing tape
- and you have a mission impossible opening scene.
- And yet,
- these 70 faithful missionaries accept their mission. -
- Each "team of two" goes out

- into the towns and regions in the area
- announcing Jesus' ministry, - -
- proclaiming God's message, - -
- and displaying God's power. - -
- And despite the seemingly impossible nature of their mission, -
- these missionaries succeeded. -
- They accomplished their ministry goal. -
- They make the radical love and compassion of Jesus known. -
- They proclaimed share good news, -
- and help people in need -
- by working together, -
- by using the gifts God had given them, -
- and by drawing on the power and presence
- of the Spirit.
- Now as far as I know,
- we don't know the names of these first 70 missionaries.
- My best guess is they are everyday, ordinary people
- who followed Jesus,
- who heard a call to ministry. - - -
- These are people who acted on what they believed - -
- which means
- they are probably perfect role models for us
- as we seek to live out our faith in the world.

- If you think about it,
 - we aren't that different than the 70.
 - We too are everyday ordinary missionaries for Jesus, -
 - regular people
 - who follow Jesus,
 - who hear a call
 - to share God's love with the world,
 - people who seek,
 - the best we can,
 - to answer God's call
 - and be God's hands and feet
 - in the world.
 - And by looking at the 70 and their missionary work,
 - I think we can discover three important lessons for us and our ministry. - -
 - First - They were essentially local missionaries.
 - When we think of missionaries,
 - we often think of far off places,
 - but these people appear to have stayed pretty local.
 - You don't have to travel thousands of miles to be a missionary.
 - The everyday patterns of your life
 - take you to all sorts of places
 - where Jesus is unknown. -
 - Your presence creates an opportunity

- for others to discover
- the story of Jesus.
- Second - We aren't in this alone. -
- Jesus didn't send out the missionaries by themselves. -
- Each went with a partner. -
- As Jesus' missionaries in the world, -
- we are a part of a community of believers. -
- We have help and support.
- We have partners with specific gifts and talents -
- to help with the ministry. -
- You don't have to go it alone. -
- In fact, -
- if we really look at what Jesus says, -
- we shouldn't try to go it alone. -
- God blesses us with a variety of gifts -
- and calls us to work together to use those gifts
- for the building up of the whole community.
- Are there times when we need to pull back and pray and recharge,
- certainly,
- but the bulk of Jesus' ministry takes place
- with the disciples -
- and when it comes time to send folks out
- he sends teams,

- so as you answer God's call to ministry,
- look for a partner or two,
- invite a partner,
- or accept an invitation to partner
- to share God's story
- in the world.- -
- and Third,
- The method of their mission work is fairly simple. -
- Jesus essentially says - -
- Be good guests.
- Share compassion.
- Proclaim God's love.
- Jesus doesn't offer long sets of rules
- or complicated theological terms
- in sending the 70.
- Jesus simply says - -
- "Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you,
- eat what is set before you;
- cure the sick who are there,
- and say to them,
- 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"
- (Lk 10:8-9)
- You don't need special training to be a missionary. -

- Following Jesus appears to be enough.
- Simply be good guests, -
 - or to say it another way,
 - share kindness and respect with others. -
- Show compassion and caring to all people
 - and be willing to speak of God's love
 - for the whole world. - -
- We live in a time when actions speak far louder than words, -
 - so if you are gracious in receiving and sharing hospitality,
 - compassionate in dealing with others,
 - and open to sharing your story at an appropriate time, -
 - then I think you will be amazed how many people
 - are interested in what God is doing. -
- Now I feel like I can say confidently
 - that none of you has ever received a mission
 - through a self-destructing tape recorder -
 - or today, I guess it would be
 - a self-deleting video, - -
- But I think the story of the 70 reminds us that
 - that in the waters of baptism
 - we were claimed as God's children forever.
 - We are called as missionaries
 - to help God love and bless the whole world,

- and we are sent
 - with the support of God's people,
 - into our communities to tell the story of God's love
 - by living lives of generosity and compassion
 - and by sharing the story of our relationship with God
 - and God's relationship with the world.
- And while I know the last few years may have made this mission
 - seem even more daunting than ever,
 - the good news is that with God's help,
 - and the support of God's people,
 - this is a mission all of us can accomplish.