Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! AMEN. The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

Last year, after having dug to the depth of 10 meters, Scottish scientists found traces of copper wire dating back 100 years and from that discovery, they concluded that their ancestors already had a telephone network in place more than 100 years ago.

Now, a scientific hypothesis is no good unless it is challenged and proven true and thus, in the weeks that followed the Scottish discovery, British scientists dug to a depth of 20 meters. Very shortly thereafter, newspapers in the United Kingdom reported that "British scientists have found traces of 200 year copper wire and thus have concluded that their ancestors already had an advanced communication network a hundred years earlier than the Scots.

One week later, Ole Johnson, a self-taught archeologist in northern Minnesota announced that he had dug as deep as 30 meters in the cornfields of his home state and that he found absolutely nothing. Ole therefore offered his conclusion to the scientific community that over 300 years ago, his ancestors were already using wireless cell phones.

Well, there you go, depending on where, why and how deeply you dig, you can usually find something, but what you do with it makes all the difference in the world. And so, for example, you and I hear a Gospel like today's and early on it becomes quite clear that we latter day readers have a lot to think about as we process it into our own lives; the lives we live outside this building as well as the work we do within these walls to send us out there. So let’s dig in to this text and peel back some layers of truth.

Level one: on the surface we see that Jesus sent out 70 apostles, 2 by 2, to precede Him and to prepare the way for Him. We can do a little head count and, depending on how many folks are on vacation this week, either we also have 70 or 50 or 100 or more to send into a harvest He described back then as "plentiful," though "the laborers are (were) few."

It was about this time each summer that my uncle would start to go out to check the grain to see if it was ripe. You could see the color of the stalks changing from green to gold. The head of the grain would get full and start to bend. I loved to watch the wind wend and wind its way through a field – never straight from west to east but circling and making patterns in the grain. My uncle would always go out after he came home from
his day job building ships and grab some grain and pop it in his mouth to taste it to see if it was ripe. When it was ready – well the combine would be greased and checked over and what would be left for us to do as he harvested was raking and baling the straw. The combine did the harvesting work – but that was the 1960’s. In the time of Jesus it took many hands to harvest. Using a sickle a single man can cut from one-half to one acre in a hard day's work. The cut grain would later have to be bound by hand to be carried to the thrashing floor. You needed laborers – many laborers to bring in a crop.

70 sounds like a large number of workers – 35-70 acres could be harvested. With the heat today I’m hoping we have 70 total between 2 services…just think what 70 of us going out to work the harvest could do in a day – a week – in the year to come?

But I wouldn't blame any of you, if having come to church on a hot sticky Sunday after the end of hard work week and facing the beginning of another one tomorrow, if you heard those words with less enthusiasm than a pastor preaching with dreams of a huge harvest, because, I think those words would have to push a couple of buttons: the exhaustion button for one, painfully pushed for every individual with too much to do and too little time to do it; the guilt button would be another.

Whether legitimate or not, most pastors and church workers come to worship each week with an uneasy sense that another week has gone by and we have not accomplished a whole lot for the kingdom of God - ah but this is not our task alone! Jesus didn’t just do it and let the disciples watch – he equipped them and sent them out! This Gospel reminds us that our time in this world is limited and the time of this world is also limited so that, to use Jesus’ words, we all have to work while it is day, before the night comes; there is an urgency to the Gospel that sometimes triggers our spiritual anxieties. If the Gospel has pushed any of those buttons for you today, kindly stay with me, because we have only made it to level one of our textual dig.

Level two is unexpected. Jesus said the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few, but He added, "Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Ask God to do the recruiting. Before He chose His 12 disciples Jesus spent the night in prayer. Guess what He was praying about - about whom to choose. And I would bet you anything, He did the same before appointing the 70.

Do we (or do I) remember to do just as Jesus said - to ask God to recruit His laborers? Are we seeking God in prayer to raise up workers to labor alongside us (Jesus did send them 2 by 2 – they weren’t given tasks to do alone and without support). We know we cannot do it all by ourselves but guilt often motivates people to try to fix their problems alone instead of putting together a team. I read a political analyst recently who pointed out that the smarter the president the less likely they were to put together good teams – or to be decisive because they over-thought everything and felt if there was a problem they should be able to figure it out alone.

It is always wise to see the harvest as a team effort – you’re empowered by the Spirit who is right there with you, but you need to be talking to others, working with
others and open to those moments when you can bring the Good News to a specific individual. Pray for workers to learn from and to mentor – and pray for lost souls!

Level three: the discomfort zone; "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." Take nothing but God's peace with you. Leave home with your master, but without your Mastercard. Oh, and by the way somebody may not appreciate the peace of God you are coming to share. Not because that person is evil (or at least no more a sinner than you or I) but simply because the time may not yet be right, or that all you are going to do is sow a seed or break up the "soul soil" a bit for someone else who comes after you. And even if you have to shake the dust off your feet when the welcome mat has been pulled out from under you, you've carried out your calling; you have announced that the Kingdom of God has come near; you have given someone an opportunity to turn around and find a forgiving God.

There are other hardships, too. You won't get rich; you probably won't stay in the best hotels-literally or metaphorically. You have to "eat" what's in front of you-literally and metaphorically…people brought pickled-pig’s feet to Jacob’s baptism in Mississippi and I remember the time my wife and I went to an Asian picnic and she said, “is this cabbage?” and I said, “No, that’s cow lung in the salad” (actually, it was quite good). But know this: there is no finer, nobler calling than to be God's ambassador to a dying world. And you don't need to wear clergy collar to be one; just be who you are, where you and willing to share the peace of God.

Level 4: success! "The 70 returned with joy, saying 'Lord, in you name, even the demons submit to us.' And Jesus replied 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightening." That's pretty heady stuff. And that along with "I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing will hurt you," well, who could ask for anything more?

I don't know if you feel like a "successful" Christian or not. Personally, I don't walk on creepy, crawly things and I know the enemy, even though he stumbles and tumbles, is still a powerful menace. But I wonder if we even know how to measure "success." Is it standing room only on a Sunday morning? Is it a balanced budget? No, but I admit that would be nice and I am confident God is capable of doing both of those things through our side-by-side work in His Kingdom.

Was St. Paul successful? Well, according to today's second lesson, the Gospel he had proclaimed to the Galatians hadn't stuck very well. He angered people. On more than one occasion, he chewed out the church for abandoning its mission. But was he faithful? Yes, he was, all the way to a martyr's death. Neither you nor I may have a martyr's death ahead of us, but we do have a martyr's life. "Martyr" means a witness, a man or woman who tells what he or she knows. The greatest witness I have to give is to Jesus – whether that is to someone who was hearing for the first time that Jesus is God’s Son and Savior (I know, you think that happens only in remote areas of the world but I met a college student from Oak Park IL who had never heard that Jesus was the Son of God) – or whether I am bearing witness to Jesus to someone who is struggling with an illness or
dire situation or in time of loss. Just to be able to share Jesus – that is an incredible honor.

We're almost done, but don't stop digging, there's one more level to go. Level 5, where Jesus tells us to "Go by the Book." Book? What book? It's not a rule book. It's not a record book. It's the book where our names are "written in heaven." Level 5 makes levels one through four, possible, powerful and passable. I don't know (and neither do you) whether a hundred years from now, our names will be remembered or if anyone will ever stop to think about us. Our names may end up nothing more than words in some genealogist's family tree, with perhaps a little history attached, but no personal connection. Level 5 is where God gets personal; our names are written in Heaven. In Heaven! Always held, always loved, always cherished, always protected. That's the "Only Book to Go By," because the story always ends in Heaven, where we receive a new beginning that will never end. Amen

Now may God's peace comfort us, shelter us, empower us and accompany us as we journey through this world and on to the next.