

## The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 10:1 – 20

Rev Joseph Highley

(transcribed from his sermon on Sunday July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022)

Grace mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is good to be back here with you, back from vacation. No more trips planned for a while. I get to be here during the week, which is really helpful for a lot of things. Helpful for doing my job. Helpful for writing sermons. Part of the process of writing sermons in advance is you've got to get your notes out. We have, once again, our notes on the back of the announcements. They'll be on the screens. One of the things that happens is there's not a lot of time for editing when you are writing stuff that far in advance, and then trying to get it all polished as you get back.

This means that if you are looking at your physical notes, you need to reverse bullet points number one and two. Editor's decision, editor being me, the Holy Spirit, hopefully working through me, deciding, nope, I want to do those the exact opposite way. You'll notice that there's a number two on the screen right now. That's supposed to be a number one, but that's okay. That's what we're starting with.

This morning we're talking about your names being written in Heaven. They're that first point and talking about you being sent out. So my question for you, what is something that you put your name on? And this is not a rhetorical question. This is an actual question. What is something you put your name on? I'll give you some examples. You put your name on the back of your Jersey; a baseball player, a basketball player. I signed my name on, say my marriage license or a mortgage or a loan for a car. You sign your credit card receipt at the end of a meal.

What else do you put your name on? On checks? You've got to sign the check. They won't take that, if it's not signed. What else do you put your name? You put your name on your homework. This is my work. Liability waiver. You've got to put your name on a liability waiver, spoken by a lifeguard. You've got to put your name on the liability waiver saying, I, so and so, release you from any harm that's going to come to me from this activity I'm about to engage in. Some people put their name on a license plate. Some like to put their name on their home, welcome to the house of, so, and so. This is the Highley household.

You put your name on a casserole dish because you want that dish back. Chances are, you're not getting it back, but you're going to put your name on it anyway. Put your name on it. There. Here's another one I wrote down. You should also be putting your name in the attendance booklets. Little red things that are there in your pews. Put your name down on that. I attended church. I received communion. I'm a member. I'm a visitor.

I have my name in a very important place. How many of you ever have ever heard of IMDB? The internet movie database. The database of all movies. It's big time. There's even an app. You

can go and you can type in Tom Hanks and you'll see every movie that Tom Hanks has been in, produced, directed, et cetera. I am on IMDB. If someone has the app, you can look it up right now. I give you permission. You can look it up. Joseph Highley. I am on IMDB for having participated in a movie. For those of you who don't have it, or don't want to look it up right now, I transcribed a letter that someone wrote so that they could read it as part of a script for a documentary on the Reformation that Concordia Seminary produced. You, literally, could not have a lesser important credit than that but I made the credits and I'm officially in the movie business as part of my time at seminary. Big deal. You guys didn't know that you were with a celebrity who's on IMDB, did you? No, that's not very impressive.

We put our name on all these things, but what exactly is your name?

Who are you? We ask this question a lot. What makes you, you? This is an important topic. Most of secular society tries to tell you that your identity, your name, your core essence of who it is to be you, what it is to be a Joseph, what it is to be a Rachell, or whoever you are, is found in something that's inside of you. Secular society really loves to tell you that it's found in your sex, sexuality, or your gender. No wonder these topics are in complete disarray in our country right now. The Bible has clear teachings about these topics but it doesn't tell us that those things are our identity.

What are the good things that we might associate with our identity? Some of the good things that I like to associate with, like who is Joseph? I'm a son. I'm a son of Dwayne and Lisa. I'm a husband, of Rachel. I'm the father of two wild and crazy kids. Currently being wild and crazy. And one in the womb, hopefully not being as wild and crazy. I'm a brother. I'm a friend. None of those things are my identity either. Those are all things I want on my obituary. Here lies John Smith, passed away yesterday at the ripe old age of 115. He was a loving father, son, brother, cousin, nephew, aunt, uncle, whatever it is. It sounds nice. Wow, they were good. They did all these good things, but that's not THE thing.

That's not THE thing that I want on my obituary. That's not THE thing that I need on my obituary.

This past week on vacation, especially with the death of my grandfather, my father's father, I got to think a lot about what it means to be a Highley. I love being a Highley. I love being a Highley, particularly because of my father. Now, my mother's maiden name is Brockman. That's where I get all my Lutheran roots from. So if you ever have anybody who's from Lafayette County, Missouri, Concordia, Alma, all there. I'm probably related to you. On the Brockman side, we're related to everybody in that county that came over in 1842. That's just the way Lutherans are. That's the German side. Those are my roots. I love being a Brockman. My grandpa is one of the two greatest men that I know. My father is the other. I love being a Highley and these two, they give me my genetic code. That's what science tells us. You get half your chromosomes from your mother, half from your father. You get your DNA made up as a combination of these two,

the Highleys and the Brockmans coming to together. This is my roots. This is my blood. That's not really who I am either.

So who am I? Who is Joseph? I'm one who is loved by Christ. I'm saved by Christ. I'm one who Christ lived and died and rose again for. I'm one who's given a new birth through the waters of the Holy Spirit. That's who I am. I'm one whose name is written in Heaven. Our reading from Luke chapter 10, Jesus sends out his 72 disciples to be his witnesses, to share the good news of the gospel, to share peace, to share the coming of the kingdom of God.

Now with Jesus' disciple groups, we have concentric circles. For those of you who don't know what a concentric circle is, circles inside of circles inside of circles. You have the three key disciples, Peter, James and John. They're with Jesus, literally everywhere. They go up on the mountain of transfiguration. They're with him when he raises people from the dead. They're the core. Then you have the 12, these are the called 12 disciples. These are the ones that Jesus names his apostles. They're the ones who will lead the church.

But you don't just have these 12 that are following Jesus around. You have a whole crowd that follows Jesus around his entire ministry. From there you have the 72. These are like the extra layer on top of the 12 disciples. These 72 Jesus sends out in sets of two to go and be his witnesses, to go and share the good news. They go, they preach the good news. They cast out demons. They cast out demons in Jesus' name. What a sight to behold. They're sitting there and they go out into these towns that Jesus is going to go to and they're actually doing miracles. How incredible is that? Jesus! The stuff that you said was going to happen happened! We cast them out in your name and it happened. Us! I didn't think that I had any sort of power in me at all. Then look! We cast them out in your name and we see demons going. We see lives being changed.

How many of you have ever seen a miracle? Something that was just so incredible that it could not be explained by any natural happenings? I've tried to think about it. I can't think of a specific instance that I've seen. I can think about stuff like my nephew, Enzo, that we were praying for when I first got here. He lost all amniotic fluid in the womb at like 20 weeks old. There was, like, a 2% chance of his survival and he survived. It's incredible. That's a miracle in its own way, but there are certainly natural explanations for that. But there are supernatural things that still happen around us that just simply cannot be explained by any science.

How many of you think you've seen something like that before? There's a few of you. Any of you brave enough to share it?

I know the Pastor is supposed to talk during the sermon. I didn't come prepared to talk about the miracles. It's okay. Think about it. Maybe, you know someone who's experienced something like that and you go, wow! That is just incredible! I've heard about things, where it's, like, I was going and I fell asleep and the truck was going off the road and next thing I know the truck's on the road and I don't know how it happened. Everything says, the scientists, the doctors at the

scene, the paramedics, the policemen, everyone says, you should have been in the ditch. We have no idea how your car wound up here and you survived. Stuff like that absolutely happens.

Any miracle, any greatness of this earth, even the stuff that we could say is explained by science, but God certainly still has his hands in, like my nephew surviving, any of that is nothing compared to the greatness that your name is written in Heaven. Me, Joseph, written in heaven. You, your name, written in Heaven, Jennifer, your name, written in Heaven. Steve, your name written in Heaven. Mike, your name written in Heaven. Your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Jesus, the savior of the world, who reigns over the whole entire world knows your name and he has your name written in Heaven. That's where you will be for eternity, in paradise, in the new heaven and the new earth, the new creation. Last week we talked about in your baptism God puts his name on you. In your baptism God puts his name on you and he puts your name up in Heaven, giving you his righteousness. You have salvation. Eternity is waiting for you because God loved you and died for you and gives you faith. Your name is written in heaven and no matter what we might see in this world, however great it is, it's nothing in comparison to that. So then, because of this, in the spirit of this reading, you are sent out to. You are sent out to be witnesses so that others might have their name written in Heaven as well. The world will oppose you. It will. It's just what's going to happen. Don't be discouraged if you get rejected. Rejoice, because they rejected you like they rejected Jesus. They're not really rejecting you after all. We can put the other slide there on the screen. The one that was number one, now number two.

This is kind of the way that it looks at it. We have the other, you, we have Jesus and God, the Father. When the other rejects you, they're not really rejecting you, they're rejecting Jesus. And they're not really rejecting Jesus even, they're rejecting God, the Father who sent Jesus. It goes down the line, but the same is true for the hearing.

Those that hear your message of good news aren't really hearing you, they're hearing the good news of Jesus. And those that are hearing that aren't really even hearing the good news of Jesus, they're hearing the good news of God, the Father who sent Jesus. So if they reject you, they're rejecting God, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If they reject you, count yourself as blessed to be that that is rejected. Just like Jesus was. The world's not so eager to hear that the God that they deny or mock or blaspheme or hate or fear is the one in whom their identity is found. They don't want their identity to be in that God. The world wants to believe that it has complete and total control and autonomy in defining who I am.

The world doesn't want a message about their name being written in Heaven or not being written in Heaven. No, it wants to say my name is written by me, myself and I, and no one else. No one else can define me. I'm true to my own self. I'm finding my own identity, my own truth. I'm discovering who I am, for me. Which is ironic because they're simply parroting the words about individualism and self autonomy that literally millions of people are using. There could be nothing less individual than that, but that's the way of the world. Wherever the world says that

our identity isn't found outside of ourselves and God is that our identity is found inside of ourselves, somehow searching within. So expect rejection. Expect aggression. But go. Go anyway. Go in the name of Jesus and you will also witness the power of God at work.

It will not be all rejection. You will witness the Holy Spirit at work in people's lives, bringing them to saving faith through your witness. You will see God's Spirit making connections and providing for people and changing lives in remarkable ways. As powerful of things as you will see happen, none of it compares to this, that your name is written in Heaven.

If you need ideas, how can I go out there and just start telling someone about Jesus? That's really intimidating. If you need ideas, Google, or turn to your bulletin "Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling" (LSB 826) There's a whole list of ideas, four versus worth of ideas, of ways that you can go and be sent and you ARE being sent. Part of being the church means you are being sent as God's witnesses. Go in the name and power of Jesus in his Spirit and rejoice that your names are written in heaven. In Jesus' name.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.