

## FOCUS: Courageous Mission & Service

“The 70 Influencers”

Sunday, October 6, 2019

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Numbers 11:16-25

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Did you ever count the number of advertisements you see or hear in an average day? In the 1970s, the average American encountered about 500 ads a day via print, television, and radio. In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that number is anywhere between 4,000 and 10,000 per day. We are exposed to thousands of marketing voices from newspaper ads, social media and website popups, billboard notices, radio spots, TV ads.

In such an oversaturated market, advertisers employ “influencers” to make their product stand out. Influencer marketing identifies and orients marketing activities around individuals, usually movie stars or sports heroes, who have influence over potential buyers. Serena Williams for Nike. Tom Brady for UGGs. Emma Stone for Revlon. Shaquille O’Neal for Icy Hot. Jennifer Aniston for Smartwater. One Direction for Pepsi. Zooey Deschanel for i-phone. Fabio for “I can’t believe it’s not butter.” The right message, coupled with the right influencer, will make all the difference in the success of an ad campaign. If they have it, we want it. Ad execs know that a well-chosen influencer will induce us to buy their product or accept their message.

**Jesus is not looking for celebs.** Jesus had a message to share, but he didn’t go looking for celebrity influencers to jump start his “marketing campaign.” He didn’t look for a sympathetic rock-star-Pharisee or a scholarly Sadducee to endorse his message. Jesus chose ordinary, everyday, working men and women. He gave them a life-transforming message and trained them how to share it through presence and persuasion. In our text, Jesus picks 70 people who didn’t particularly stand out, but people whom Jesus believed would be influencers. Jesus sent these 70 influencers out because he believed that they had the power to sway people for God’s kingdom.

Why 70? Perhaps Jesus intended to represent the 70 nations of Jewish tradition (Genesis 10), or perhaps Jesus followed God’s command to Moses to choose 70 elders to assist him in leading the people of Israel (Numbers 11:16-25). Earlier, Jesus sent out 12 disciples in a similar way (Luke 9:1-6), but now the number of influencers is expanded. Perhaps this new group even contained some people influenced by that first mission!

Jesus sent these 70 influencers to the places where Jesus himself “*intended to go*” (v. 1). They would go as Jesus’ agents to test the waters (as it were) for God’s kingdom message. The 70 would travel in pairs for mutual support and encouragement. They would travel lightly, without fine clothes or a purse or even a change of sandals. They would not spend time chatting up people who might distract them from their mission (v. 4). They would rely solely on the hospitality of strangers and be ready to move on if they received a hostile reception. They would be fully transparent, exposed, and sent “*like lambs into the midst of wolves*” (v. 3). It’s not a very appealing job description! So, what kind of message would induce these 70 influencers to agree to this kind of assignment?

**What’s the product?** The message was simply this: *peace* (v. 5). For Jesus, the kingdom of God was a comprehensive package of world-changing ideas, actions, and events intended to change the lives of all peoples. The message of Jesus, spread by his influencers, contained both a message of hope and one of warning. The way forward was peace: peace with God, peace with each other, peace with creation. But, refusal to buy into the peace Jesus offered promised disaster. The recipients’ willingness to accept Jesus and his message was the pre-condition for receiving God’s peace (v. 6). If people rejected God’s peace, it would be returned to the influencers to be offered to someone else.

**Hospitality.** The key feature of this campaign would be hospitality. In Middle Eastern culture, to eat with someone signified respect and friendship, and it created an atmosphere of trust. When the 70 influencers received such hospitality, Jesus instructed them to remain in the same house (not to move around looking for a better bed or meal) and to eat and drink whatever the hosts put before them (vv. 7-8). Being a good guest raised the probability that the hosts would listen to and be influenced by these messengers. The stronger the bond of friendship, the more likely that they would hear and accept the message.

**Authenticity.** A key feature of any good campaign is the ability to demonstrate that what you’re selling works. Is this the real deal? Is it reliable? The 70 were not only promoting God’s peace, they were also offering authenticity. Jesus sent the 70 influencers out to “*cure the sick*” as a sign that God’s kingdom had come near (v. 9). The kingdom of God is about peace, wholeness, and restoration, and Jesus demonstrated these features everywhere he went. Jesus invested the 70 with the power to do what he did, much as those 70 elders received a portion of Moses’ spirit to do his work (Numbers 11:25). The

arrival of the kingdom of God meant that things would change. Wherever Jesus or his influencers went, that change would become apparent in the healed bodies and restored spirits of others.

**No hard sell.** Of course, there was a flip side. In modern marketing, it's easy for a consumer to simply scroll past and ignore a never-ending series of ads. The good news of God's kingdom, however, cannot be so easily dismissed. Rejecting God's kingdom carries consequences, and Jesus instructed the 70 influencers not to spend any time trying to convince the unmotivated or those unwilling to conform. There would be no hard sell. Those towns which refused Jesus' offer of God's peace would suffer the same destruction as Sodom (vv. 10-12). But for those towns and peoples who received Jesus and his message, there would be peace, restoration, and eternal life with God.

The marketing blitz conducted by the 70 was apparently a big success. The 70 influencers "*returned with joy,*" claiming that they initiated a cosmic shift which rocked Satan's plans (vv. 17-18). Jesus cautioned them that this should not be the measure of their success; instead, their success should be found in their own acceptance of God's peace and their own entrance into God's kingdom (v. 20). Jesus would soon go to Jerusalem to seal this deal, and to defeat Satan, sin, and death once, for all time and for all people.

Jesus is still looking for influencers to represent him; people who are willing to work together to take the good news of his triumph over Satan, evil, sin, and death into a world where people are buying everything but the truth. Jesus is looking for people who are willing to offer God's healing peace to a world filled with division and bitterness. Jesus is looking for those who are willing to eat with strangers and make friends of enemies, gaining a hearing for the good news. Jesus is looking to invest his healing and transforming power in those who will risk everything to follow him and spread his message of life and love.

The cool thing is that you do not have to be a famous athlete, a movie star, or a rock star to be an influencer for Jesus. Jesus seeks real people who are willing to share what they know about who God is and what God does for us. Most importantly, Jesus wants people who really live the message. Jesus wants influencers who love what they find in relationship with God and in the new life they enjoy by God's Spirit.

It really is, simply, all about sharing God's peace. Influencers, who share God's peace, influence others to accept that peace and then to go out and be influencers themselves! The good news about Jesus' love isn't a product to be sold, but a gift to be accepted. The good news about God's peace isn't a commodity to be traded, but a promise to be fulfilled. The good news of the Spirit's life-transforming work is not a service to be rented, but a reality to be lived. If we truly believe this, then people will buy into Jesus because they buy into us! Those who live the way of Jesus well are the best marketers of the greatest solution to the world's greatest need!

As part of our FOCUS campaign, we want you to become greater influencers for Jesus. Be courageous in your mission and service to your neighbors. Tell them what Jesus means to you. Let them see in you the peace of Christ which passes all understanding, the peace of God which heals, the peace of the Spirit which transforms life. Our FOCUS goals are:

- "200 Club" – each member giving 200 hours of community service
- 20 new mission participants – never volunteered before? Now is the time!
- 20 youth in mission projects – youth have surprising gifts/deep compassion for helping
- 20 people to House of Hope – extend our reach to a far-flung part of God's creation
- 20 boxes of Blessings to cancer center each quarter – compassionate care

Prayer: Loving God, grant us the grace to share your peace to the world through our faithful witness. Teach us how to be open with others about our faith in Jesus, to speak the truth in love, humbly and without shame. Save us from the temptation to conform to what is popular or what is favored by people we admire for their success in the world. Teach us how to rely upon you, in the power of your Spirit, and not upon ourselves, to bring in the harvest of your Kingdom. Let us seek no other reward than to know that we will receive what is promised to faithful witnesses: to know you and to enjoy the communion of the saints forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

#### Sources:

- Cook, Karla. "13 influencer marketing campaigns to inspire and get you started with your own." *HubSpot*, hubspot.com. Retrieved January 19, 2019.
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