

## Luke 10: 1 – 9

I suspect they felt very nervous about what lay in store. A feeling we have all had at some time or other. We don't really know much about this group of 70 that Jesus sent out ahead of him, but we can be pretty certain that they were apprehensive.

Firstly, they weren't the main disciples. The 12 had been sent out earlier and we're told this is a different group of people. They weren't the A-team if you like. They hadn't had the privilege of being with Jesus from the beginning. They weren't experienced.

Secondly, he was sending them into either Gentile or Samaritan territory and telling them to stay in people's homes – that would almost certainly involve eating food that wasn't ritually pure. Some would find that challenging. It's interesting to note that Pharisees used to run missions as well, but they always took their own food with them. Jesus is clear to this group, though: take nothing with you.

Thirdly, he also made no secret of the fact that in some places, the welcome wouldn't be so warm. Or at least, not warm in a positive way. He said he was sending them out as lambs among wolves – this might not gain full marks as an example of motivational speaking.

So from what little we do know from Luke, we can be sure that these 70 were moving out of their comfort zone.

We've all at times had the experience of, willingly or otherwise, ending up doing something we wouldn't normally have dreamt of attempting. As an enthusiastic 21 year old Christian I thought I should have a bash at signing up to help with a church outreach programme one summer. This was not really my thing, I suspected, and as there were several different ones to choose from, I deliberately chose the most low-key one on the list in an obscure village. It was only after I arrived that I realised I hadn't read the small print and that I was to spend the whole week helping to take a lead in a big children's holiday club. I had no idea of how to talk to children, they were a closed book to me having not really communicated with any for 10 years or so, and I was well out of my comfort zone. In fact, it felt as though my comfort zone was on a different continent. I was kicking myself for being such an idiot. After about 2 days, I was enjoying it and realised I was cut out for it. After 4 days, I just couldn't wait for the children to arrive each day, and ever since, I have loved

any church work involving children. It was a step out of the comfort zone that I think the good Lord was quietly overseeing.

To give a far bigger and more impressive example, the work of Mother Teresa of Calcutta is extremely well-known. What is less well-known is that it started through an enormous leap outside her comfort zone. She was a nun teaching at a girls' grammar school in Calcutta, who got permission from the then Pope to leave her order and go and work in the slums. She simply felt it was right. When she started, she had no place to stay, no food, and the equivalent of 2 dollars with her. Oh yes, we might think, but it was alright for her, she was a strong Christian with a call from God. But we would be wrong. She hated leaving the convent, where she had been very happy. She talked later of "a strong feeling of loss and of fear that was difficult to overcome" as she set out and entered this very deprived part of the city. The Missionaries of Charity, which started with just Mother Teresa herself, is today a worldwide organisation, active in 133 countries. It doesn't bear thinking what the world would have been deprived of if she had not overcome that fear.

Stepping out of our comfort zone can be in ways that may seem small: inviting someone a bit lonely to our home even though it's someone we don't naturally find that easy; taking part in some way in church life that we've never tried before. These can be small, but very, very significant.

So finally, I'm sure that all of us from time to time sit here in church and feel in our hearts the "peace which passes all understanding." We can and should enjoy the familiar. We love familiar hymns and are trying to work out now how as a church we'll be able to sing familiar carols in December. The disciples we can be sure, also knew times of sitting and eating with Jesus in familiar surroundings and enjoying a comfortable evening just among themselves. But real discipleship which is basically following where Jesus takes us, is also sometimes going to involve the risky but enriching willingness to step out of that zone. Speaking as someone who loves the familiar, I ask the question of you and of myself: Do we prefer our faith to be entirely comfortable? And in a given situation, how will you recognise when God is perhaps prodding us out of the comfort zone and urging us to step out in faith? And having recognised it, what response will we give to him?

