

Blessed 4th of July (and 5th and 6th and...well, you get the idea!)

I remember my first day teaching. I was in a juvenile center in Florida. I had been shadowing a teacher for 2 days until the end of the 2nd day, the very last class of the day, she said, your turn. And she walked out the door.

Wait...what?

Nervously and without much confidence, I struggled through the class and had a huge sigh of relief when the class period was over. Whew!

As I was leaving, having more confidence, I noticed that my wallet was missing. Again...Wait...what?! The guard suggested that I go check my car as he held the students in the classroom. On my way to the car, I remembered that I had moved my wallet to another place AT HOME! I had not even brought it with me.

I went back, humbled, and confessed my forgetfulness. I asked the students for forgiveness. As the students were leaving, one passed me and said, "that's 1".

I can only imagine what the disciples felt as they went out into the countryside 2 by 2. Those early followers of Jesus had seen Jesus received with joy by people in the towns. They had seen Jesus rejected. But, those disciples had a very important message to deliver.

They were probably nervous at first. They made mistakes because they did not listen to the Holy Spirit as they ought. The Holy Spirit backed them up with power; they were able to perform miracles. They could heal the sick and cast out demons. They came back to Jesus overjoyed at what they could do.

God sends us out 2 by 2, 1 by 1, 14 by 14 to go out into the countryside. We are nervous and we are hesitant because of how God's message will be received. We wrongly interpret their reception as our proficiency. Jesus reminds us that this ministry is not about "us" but about "them". It is not about how well we will perform (after all, it is the power of the Holy Spirit) but how people receive the message.

Rejection or reception is all about them, those whom we meet. We do well to remember that the power of the Holy Spirit works 100% of the time, most of the time in spite of our ability. The people to whom the message is taught receive the power of the Spirit of God.

If they receive it with open hearts, God's blessings belong to them. If they reject it with hardened hearts, God's blessings are closed off to them.

It is their choice, not our skill. We are sent out to bring the good news to those whom we meet. That is why we are here. (*Psssst. Don't be nervous. Jesus sent you. And since HE sent you, you have all of the wisdom, skill, and power that you need.*)