

# Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: June 24, 2012  
Sermon Title: Miracles 'R' Us  
Scripture: Luke 10:1-9  
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

## **Luke 10:1-9**

*After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."*

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"You're doing WHAT?" I heard that question asked twice, a few years apart.

Once it was at the ASP hamburger/hotdog wagon that Len Morgan used to run at the Dogwood Festival to raise money for ASP. A customer was asking one of the teenagers what the proceeds went to, and the high school kid was explaining: "We're raising money ... to go to Appalachia ... right after school ends, to fix houses ...." The customer grew more and more perplexed, even stunned as the whole idea started to come together: teenagers crawling under houses, climbing onto roofs, a thousand miles from home, this first week of summer vacation. So the customer said, "You're doing WHAT?"

The other occasion was after church one Sunday. A couple of folks were talking with Dave Engelman about his summer plans. David was a tall, distinguished, successful, retired gentleman, always impeccably dressed, about 70 years old at the time, and he was describing his summer plans to

ride on a bus for 1,000 miles with a 100 teenagers, sleep in a school gym, eat peanut butter sandwiches, and lead a work crew of high school kids. Not quite sure of what they were hearing, Dave's friends said, "You're doing WHAT?"

Actually, people's surprise isn't really surprising. Our whole Appalachia mission trip can be described in two words: insane and impossible. In my e-mail Bible Study last week, I was writing about "miracles." Two thousand years ago, the early Christian Church was full of miracles. "Signs and wonders," the Bible calls them, unexpected, surprising things led to power and healing and boldness and success!

Christianity grew from 120 trembling, doubtful people to 10,000 in just a couple of weeks. Everybody was hanging out together, having a ball, sharing everything, helping others, getting along. From the outside, it was insane and impossible, just like ASP. From the inside, it was a miracle. And so in the e-mail Bible Study, I admitted that a lot of people, even Christian people, don't believe in miracles. Some Christians think that miracles were just for another time, not for the modern, rational world of today. Some Christians don't believe in miracles, period. Some Christians think that "signs and wonders," the extraordinary, the proof of God's power, miracles, that they happen only in other churches, not in a church like ours. You know ... old, boring, New England, liberal, mainline, Congregational. Nothing special could happen here. No "signs and wonders." Nothing spectacular. No miracles.

So in the e-mail I said to people, "Just imagine our ASP trip from beginning to end. All of it. Every detail. Think about it. And then tell me it's not a miracle."

Two hundred people: 150 teenagers, 50 of them freshmen. Three buses. Ten events. Mountain roads. Seven days, 21 meals. Snakes. Spiders. Power tools, saws and hammers and crowbars. Construction, destruction. Rain, heat. New people, old people, strangers. No sleep. No computers.

And every year, more want to do it; more want to go back. Kids grow up, become adults, return to help. Houses get fixed, barriers are broken, strangers became friends. Miracles happen.

I'll close with a Bible story. When Jesus was doing his work, he eventually gathered a decent-sized group of followers, people who believed in what he was doing, and they were willing to try it. Those followers were very much like Alida's ASP team. I'm serious. If you look at this ASP team, teenagers and adults, from the newest, youngest 13-year-old freshman to the most

seasoned adult volunteer on his or her 20th or 25th year, none of them is a Biblical scholar, none of them is perfect, none of them has everything all figured out.

They've all been to Alida's mandatory training sessions. They've watched ASP videos, they've done the "How-to-cut-sheetrock" practice, they've been to SPF during the year, they've sat through 40 weeks of Alida's devotions, they've even respectfully sat through one of my harangues and applauded when I was done! When Alida was in India in February, I took the chance to be the mean old minister, complete with threatening, scolding, "You'd better behave or else! Don't let Alida down. Don't mess up. Be responsible, take care of one another. God is watching. I know where you live. I'll hunt you down," finger wagging ... and they applauded!

So, like Jesus's Disciples, they have a taste of what ASP is like and what Greenfield Hill Church is like and what our Christianity is like. And they're willing to try it.

That's what Jesus's Disciples did. They listened. They watched. And they signed on for a week's mission team. So Jesus sent them out on their own, away from family, away from what they knew, what was comfortable, what was familiar. They were told to rough it. To go with the flow. To accept what came their way. Not to worry. Oh, I almost forgot. They were told to change the world. To upset the natural order of things. To do the insane and the impossible. Specifically: heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, stomp on snakes, and drive out demons. Just a typical ASP mission team.

You think I'm kidding or exaggerating? When people hear "demons" or "raising the dead" or "snakes," they think of "The Exorcist" or Appalachian snake handlers or weird religion. That's too narrow.

The dead, the demons, the snakes come in all forms. Broken dreams. Despair. Benign neglect. Grinding poverty. Ostracism. Isolation. Addiction. Black-lung disease. Mine work. Closed mines with an "e." Closed minds with a "d."

So when 200 Fairfield people show up, from high school freshmen to seasoned senior citizens, and smile and saw and befriend and fix and repair a dream or a porch; and embrace a child or a way of life; and lift a spirit or a bag of cement; and change impressions or roofing ....

Those are the snakes we handle. Those are the demons. Those are the dead we raise. And it's a miracle.