



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JULY 7, 2019
ISAIAH 66:10-14; PSALM 66:1-8; GALATIANS 6:1-16; LUKE 10:1-11, 16-20

WAIT, WHAT?

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 [*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.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'*

"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.""]

Today's Gospel tells us Jesus sent out the seventy – and they returned with joy.

They returned with joy. But... the Gospel doesn't say how they went out! Perhaps they were excited, even proud to be chosen. Wow!

I'm one of the seventy chosen to go out! Jesus thinks I'm awesome! I AM awesome!

Maybe.

But... the Gospel doesn't say how they reacted once they got the instructions: Take

no purse, no bag, no sandals. *Huh?* Eat whatever unclean food is put in front of you, don't seek out better lodging – *Um, okay?* – and if they don't welcome you, do not call down fire from heaven, like James and John suggested last week... I'm sending you out like lambs among wolves.

“Wait, WHAT?”

Now, I imagine not all seventy of those men and women were totally extraordinary. Seventy? I mean, even the inner circle of twelve had their shortcomings throughout the Gospels. I imagine most of these seventy were regular people, drawn to Jesus, excited to be chosen and sent out on a mission – but then a little dubious, scared even, about what they were being asked to do.

I think most of us can relate to that feeling. I remember doing a year of hospital chaplain residency, a training program I felt lucky to have been accepted into. We had been there just a few days, covering some of the basics, and then all of the sudden our supervisor assigned us to our hospital floors and said, “Okay, this afternoon, go out to your wards and start visiting.”

“Wait, WHAT?”

We're not ready! We don't know anything! Aren't we going to have lot and lots of training before we're asked to go actually speak to people? Aren't we bringing a tool kit? AHHHH!

I imagine maybe that's how many of those seventy felt about heading out on the dangerous roads with limited instructions

and no supplies. But when Jesus sends you out, what're you going to do?

So they set out with faith, trusting – at least enough to get started – that *Jesus wasn't wrong about this*. And here's the bigger thing. He didn't say, “Go, and don't come back until you succeed.” He doesn't talk about measuring success at all. He just said bring them peace, and let them know, whether they accept the peace or not, that the Kingdom has come near. Because how were any of these cities to know Jesus, to know the Kingdom has come near, unless someone showed them? And note, I'm saying SHOWED, not TOLD.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus does not give them a detailed script, does not tell them which of his miracles to talk about, which of his parables to explain. He sends them out with a message of peace and the Kingdom of God has come near. But as you and I well know, peace is just talk, unless it happens in person.

This is OUR mission, too, whether we think we are fully ready or not. We Christians ARE the seventy. We are to go forth in Christ's name – and by the way we live and travel through our lives, what we say AND what we do, to proclaim Christ's peace and the nearness of the Kingdom. And it's urgent work! Jesus tells these disciples, “Don't dilly-dally along the way with lengthy greetings to everybody on the road – do this work with urgency and intention!”

They're to share the Good News of Jesus – Jesus, who earlier in the Gospel of Luke said he came “*to bring good news to the poor ... to*

proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" [Luke 4:18]. That's an urgent mission in a world under the thumb of empire, in a world of injustice and division, both then and now. They are announcing that the Kingdom has come near, and as we heard in Paul's letter to the Galatians today, "This new creation is everything!"

Don't get side-tracked!

And you know what really side-tracks us? Rejection. We get stuck there sometimes, demoralized. I feel it, and I feel it all around us in these times, and I know many of you do, too. This urgency to bring Christ's peace is rejected by the hate and division that seems to have a stranglehold right now. But Jesus told the disciples if they are rejected, to shake the dust off and keep on going – because the Kingdom is still near, regardless. And it is near with both those who are with us – and with those who disagree with us!

Our modern ears are inclined to hear Jesus' "shake the dust off" as a recrimination but think of how we use the expression "shake it off." Don't let it bog you down, don't get stuck in it! Keep moving on with the mission, right? This is so important right now, when we're feeling discouraged by new atrocities every day right on our own doorstep and struggling hard to countermand what seems like an unstoppable barrage. But remember the Talmud quote: "Do not be daunted. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."

Amen! The Kingdom is near, and we are to stay on our mission of bringing Christ's peace! Archbishop Desmond Tutu, when he received the Nobel Peace Prize, said:

There is no peace because there is no justice. ...God's Shalom, peace, involves inevitably righteousness, justice, wholeness, fullness of life, participation in decision-making, goodness, laughter, joy, compassion, sharing and reconciliation. ...When there is injustice, invariably peace becomes a casualty. [1]

We certainly see that struggle in our time, but it's not new. In Jesus' time, the *Pax Romana*, the Roman Peace, was supposed to be this great peace brought in by a mighty empire through conquest and domination. But as with all domination, only an elite few prospered or had peace, and the subjects were burdened and intimidated. Injustice is never peace. God's peace is different; it isn't about domination. And when his disciples are sent forth to proclaim the peace of the Kingdom, they are bringing the good news that upends the politics of power and uplifts the lowly and oppressed.

Is this Gospel, then, our Gospel, political? **Yeah, it's political!** And lest you think that's just a modern interpretation, here is a couplet from William Blake's poem "The Everlasting Gospel" written two centuries ago:

*His seventy Disciples sent
Against Religion and Government—*

Carrying Christ's peace into the world upends the powers that hold people down, both dogma and empire. We see it in action around us now:

It's the parishioners who created great materials and teamed up at the Saint Mark's table at PrideFest last week – extending Christ's peace with their presence and welcome – in an era when LGBTQ rights and dignity are being re-attacked more and more.

It's this parish and the Sanctuary volunteers who stand here at Saint Mark's with Jaime and his family, and who showed up at Gethsemane Lutheran Church last week in solidarity with Jose Robles as he marked a year in Sanctuary – both of them fighting for, holding on for, justice, in an era when our nation separates families and brutalizes children.

It's the Northwest Community Bail Fund, started here, that helps people accused of low-level crimes who don't have bail money to have an equal opportunity to defend themselves from a position of freedom – at a time when 70% of people in jail have not been convicted of any crime!

I could go on and on. You know it, because you live it in so many ways, both in, and involved in, church – and in your life and

pursuits outside of church! And we live it in community. In today's Gospel, Jesus didn't send the disciples out alone; he sent them two-by-two. And neither are we sent out alone; we gather in community, we work *in community*, and we act on our faith in and for the community! That's how we bring Christ's peace and live into the Kingdom.

Not everyone of us feels entirely prepared to go out, but our urgent message is peace-cum-justice – and the Kingdom has come near. Not everyone is going to receive our message, but it's not delivered in vain, because the Kingdom still has come near. We Christians stay hopeful in the midst of uncertainty because we know, and believe, the Kingdom of God has come near – and we live into it.

Paul summed it up in the letter we read from today:

Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up.

I **do** trust that Jesus wasn't wrong about this.

[1] Desmond Tutu, 1984 Nobel Peace Prize Speech, accessed July 4, 2019 at <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/bishop-desmond-tutu-awarded-nobel-peace-prize-oslo>

