

Proper 9C 2016 Sermon

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."

At the beginning of Chapter 9 in Luke's Gospel, Jesus sent out his 12 Disciples – those whom he had chosen to be future leaders of his Church – to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal. *Today's* Gospel is the beginning of Chapter 10, and Jesus is sending out 70 *others* to do the same thing: to proclaim the Kingdom and to heal. Now, if the 12 are the future **leaders** of the church (today we might call them clergy), who are the 70? Some scholars suggest we think of them as the laity – folk like you! So I am asking each of you today to see yourself as one of the 70 in today's Gospel, and hear Jesus send *you* out. Interestingly, our average weekend attendance here at Christ Church is almost 70, so it shouldn't be too hard to relate: this is a Gospel passage about you, the lay members Christ Church. And what is Jesus' mission for you? What does he send Christ Church out into the world to do? Our Gospel tells us that it is first, to bring peace. Then to heal the sick (in mind or spirit) and to say to them (in word and deed), 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

Bring peace; heal; and reveal the in-breaking Kingdom of God by word and action. Can you see that as your God-appointed mission as you walk out those doors today?

But there is more to Jesus' instructions: for he tells the 70 – *you* – not only *what* to do, but *how to go about* this mission. He says, “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.” Then he gives detailed instructions about how they are to find lodging and food, and what to do when received or rejected by people. The fact is, Jesus spends **far** more time detailing the “how” of the mission than he spends on the “what” of the mission – the healing and pronouncing the Kingdom. Which should tell us that the “how” may be even *more* important than the “what”!

Now, certainly, the “how” in this passage is very challenging to us modern Americans, for Jesus' instructions are counter to much of our American system of values. On this Independence Day weekend, Jesus is quite literally instructing the 70 – with whom I am asking you to identify – to be totally vulnerable and **dependent** – **dependent** on one another, and **dependent** on those strangers to whom they (and you) are sent.

Notice that Jesus instructs the 70 to go out in pairs, *not* as individuals. Your mission to impart peace, to heal, and to reveal the in-breaking Kingdom of God in this community is not something you do alone; it is shared, so that, as David Lose writes, “when one falters, the other can help. When one is lost, the other can seek the way. When one is discouraged, the other can hold faith for both for a while. That’s what the company of believers does – we hold on to each other, console each other, encourage and embolden each other, and even believe for each other.” * Jesus’ detailed instructions remind us that we find success only *with* and *for* each other.

But this is not easy for us Americans, for we live in a culture that prizes *individual* rights, *individual* freedoms; a culture where we are taught to look out for number 1; a culture of competition, rather than cooperation. That’s why we have 35,000 different Christian denominations in this country, and why nothing can get accomplished in Congress; we cannot seem to work together for the common good, as Jesus spells out in today’s Gospel.

Yet if the mission on which Jesus sends us is to succeed, it will require that all parts of the Body of Christ work together, as St. Paul so eloquently writes in his letters. After all, Jesus tells the 70 that he sends them out as sheep in the midst of wolves. In other words, they – and we – will meet resistance to our Christ-sent mission to bring peace and healing and the Kingdom! And as David Lose points out, it is “little wonder. [For Jesus] said from the outset that he had come to set free those whom society deemed criminals, to heal those who had been cast aside, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor in an empire that worshiped Caesar as Lord... When the powers of the world are challenged, all kinds of things get upset.”* When faced with resistance from the established powers, systems, and values of our world (to which St. Paul tells us we should not be conformed – Rom. 12:2), we need the support of others; for as Benjamin Franklin reportedly

said when he signed the Declaration of Independence, “We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”

Jesus sends out a whole community – about the size of our congregation. And he tells them to take *nothing* with them, so that they must be totally dependent upon the hospitality and generosity of the very people to whom they are sent!

Can you appreciate how outrageous and counter-cultural these instructions are? Sending people on a journey with no water, no food, no money, no shoes, all the while knowing that they will be like sheep in the midst of wolves, and that their message – along with their very selves! – will be rejected by many? Knowing that they will face such opposition and resistance, the *least* Jesus could do would be to give them water, food, shoes, and some emergency spending money to start the journey! Does Jesus care at all what happens to them? And here is a detail that is easy to miss: Jesus tells the 70 to “eat what is set before them;” which means, since they will be going to Gentile territory, they may well have food set before them which their belief system tells them is *wrong* to eat. Talk about giving up *everything* for the sake of the Gospel! They will need to give up not only a secure supply of food and water and money, but also some of their cherished beliefs! All for the sake of the strangers to whom they are sent, and upon whom they are *dependent* for their very survival.

David Lose writes: “Most of us find such dependence uncomfortable. [Dependence] makes us feel like we’re not prepared, maybe unsafe, definitely vulnerable.

“[And] I wonder if that’s the point. I mean, we *are* vulnerable. We forget this, too, going to great lengths to manufacture and perpetuate illusions of control, independence, and invulnerability. But any illness, any loss, any death or disappointment or tragedy [any of which could happen to any of us at any moment] reminds us painfully of just how incredibly vulnerable we are.

“And so Jesus sends his disciples out in pairs and instructs them to rely **entirely** upon the hospitality of others. Why? Because *this is our natural state*: we are stronger when we stay together and our welfare is inextricably linked to that of each other. ‘No man is an island,’ wrote Anglican priest and poet John Donne. The loss of any, he went on to say, diminishes each.

“... In the United States, we sometimes see [Independence Day] as a tribute not just to our independence from Great Britain but also to the spirit of American individualism. Yet the individualism we celebrate is as much a myth of the culture as is our invulnerability. The pilgrims and pioneers who settled this land were incredibly aware that their survival depended on each other. The colonies they eventually established, after all, we called ‘commonwealths,’ places where the good of any individual was inextricably linked to the good of the whole.”*

My friends, I step back and look at the situation of these 70 followers of Jesus, with whom I've asked you to identify, and I realize that in obeying Jesus' detailed instructions, they are putting themselves in a situation that is strikingly similar to the situation of many of the refugees fleeing war and starvation today, or the homeless people I meet in our own community. Extremely vulnerable, not knowing whether they will have a place to stay or water to drink or food to eat, relying on the compassion and generosity of others to simply survive, but often finding wolf-like behavior instead of compassion.

And I wonder, Was this Jesus' intention when he sent out the 70? That they might share and experience the plight of refugees and the homeless? They might experience that kind of total vulnerability and total dependence on others, even as they are sharing their own God-given gifts of peace, healing, and the Kingdom? Who are the givers and who are the receivers in this story, after all? Are not the 70 followers of Jesus **and** the strangers and foreigners to whom they are sent both givers and receivers? And is that not exactly how Jesus intentionally set up this mission, in order to show us – in a very powerful, experiential way – that God created us in just this way: that we might be both givers and receivers, dependent on one another as members of the same body?

AMEN

*David Lose, "The Greater Gift," Monday, July 01, 2013 <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=2617>