

Proper 9C 2019 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."

If you are a novice training to join the Roman Catholic religious order of the Jesuits (of which Pope Francis is a member), one of your requirements is to be sent on "Pilgrimage." You are given \$5 and a one-way bus ticket to some city that your novice director has determined. A Jesuit web site explains what happens next: "For the next 12-14 days, the novice seeks the tangible presence of God to deepen his reliance on God's care, God's protection, God's voice. ...[The] novice *begs* for food, shelter, and transportation, making very real his dependence on God's loving care"¹ – as well as his dependence on others.

Jesus established the *model* for this kind of "pilgrimage." At the beginning of Chapter 9 in Luke's Gospel, Jesus sends out his 12 Disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal, as he himself has done. Jesus tells them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic."² *Today's* Gospel is the beginning of Luke's *next* chapter, Chapter **10**, and Jesus is sending out 70 *others* to do the same thing: to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal. And he tells *them*: "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals..."

Now, if the 12 Disciples symbolize the future **leaders** of the church (in Catholic tradition the 12 Disciples are considered the first bishops of the Church), then who are the 70? They represent the *rest* of Jesus' followers – folk like you and me! Today's story isn't *just* about those 70; it is about you and me, and what Jesus is sending *us* out to do: to spread the kingdom of God – the rule of love, compassion, and forgiveness – and to heal all manner of illness, brokenness and division. We promise to do this in our baptismal vows: to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourself; and to strive for justice and peace among **all** people, respecting the dignity of *every* human being.³ In today's Gospel, the 70 (representing us) are sent out to bring peace, to heal the sick (whether in body, mind, or spirit) and to say to them (by word and deed), "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

Bring peace; heal; and reveal the in-breaking Kingdom of God through loving word and action. Might we see that as **our** God-appointed mission as *we* are sent into the world after worship today?

But Jesus tells the 70 – who represent *you* and *me* – not only *what* to do (heal and proclaim the Kingdom), but *how to go about it*. He says, "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals..." I don't need to tell you how very *challenging* this would be 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 – who represent us – to be **dependent**: vulnerable (like sheep among wolves), **dependent** on God, and **dependent** on those strangers to whom they are being sent.

Notice, also, that Jesus instructs the 70 to go out in pairs, *not* as individuals. **Our** mission to impart peace, to heal, and to reveal the in-breaking Kingdom of God in this community is not something any **one** of us does *alone*; it is a shared mission, 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."⁴ (unquote) Jesus' instructions remind us that we find success only *with* and *for* each other, as members one of another, the Body of Christ.

But this is not easy for us Americans, since 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 parents who claim their right *not* to vaccinate their children, despite the fact that in *exercising* that right they are endangering all the *other* children in the school which their child attends. That's why we have 35,000 different Christian denominations in this country, and why practically nothing can get accomplished

in Congress; we simply cannot seem to work together for the **common** good, as the founders of our nation would have us do, and as Jesus would have us do.

Jesus tells the 70 that he is sending them out as sheep in the midst of wolves. In other words, they – and we – will meet resistance to our mission to bring peace and healing and the Kingdom of God. When we are faced with resistance from the established powers, systems, and values of our world (a 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 of 70 people, about the size of our Christ Church membership. 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 being sent!

Can you appreciate how outrageous and counter-cultural these instructions seem today? 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?

You would think that if Jesus *knows* that the 70 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 shelter 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 *de*pendent 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 *in*vulnerability. 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 actually are. [I was powerfully reminded of that fact when I recently visited my 93-year-old father.]

Dr. Lose continues: “And so, Jesus sends [the 70] 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, were called ‘commonwealths,’ places where the good of any individual was inextricably linked to the good of the whole.”⁴
[Four of our states *still* call themselves commonwealths.]

My friends, I step back and look at the situation of those 70 followers of Jesus, with whom **we** are to identify, and I realize that in obeying Jesus’ instructions, they are putting themselves in a situation that it is strikingly similar to the situation of many of the refugees fleeing war, violence, and starvation today, or the homeless people we 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 or health care or medications, relying on the compassion and generosity of others to simply survive, but often finding wolf-like behavior instead of compassion for Jesus’ lambs.

And I wonder, was this Jesus’ *intention* when he sent out those 70 “others” – that they might share and experience the plight of refugees, widows, lepers, orphans, foreigners, and the homeless? That 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 God’s 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? Did not St. Paul write, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the **common** good”? (1 Cor. 12:7) And is that not exactly how Jesus intentionally set up this mission in today’s Gospel, in order to show the 70 and us – in a very powerful, experiential way – that God created us to be both givers **and** receivers? This weekend, as we remember our political *independence* from Great Britain, may we remember also the spiritual reality of our *dependence* on God, and our *interdependence*, as a global community, upon each another. My friends, I believe it is clear that this is the lesson Jesus wanted the 70 – and us – to learn.

AMEN

1 <http://jesuitscentralsouthern.org/story?TN=PROJECT-20190111104457>

2 Luke 9:3

3 *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305

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