

## And then the Fireworks Started!

4 Pentecost C

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### **Gospel: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20**

*Jesus commissions harvesters & laborers to go where he would go & do what he would do. Risking hardship & danger in exchange for the experience of great joy, they offer peace & healing as signs that the reign of God is near.*

<sup>1</sup>After this the Lord appointed 70 others & sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town & place where he himself intended to go. <sup>2</sup>Jesus said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers for the harvesting. <sup>3</sup>Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup>Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; & greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup>Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ <sup>6</sup>& if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup>Remain in the same house, eating & drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. <sup>8</sup>Whenever you enter a town & its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup>cure the sick who are there, & say to them, ‘The dominion of God has come near to you.’ <sup>10</sup>But whenever you enter a town & they do not welcome you, go out into its streets & say, <sup>11</sup>‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the dominion of God has come near.’ <sup>16</sup>“Whoever listens to you listens to me, & whoever rejects you rejects me, & whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” <sup>17</sup>The 70 returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” <sup>18</sup>Jesus said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. <sup>19</sup>See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes & scorpions, & over all the power of the enemy; & nothing will hurt you. <sup>20</sup>Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

### **Overview - Sent with the 70**

Close your eyes & picture Jesus & his followers together. Most likely people either picture Jesus sitting around with the twelve disciples or standing in the midst of thousands preaching & teaching. Yet in today’s gospel Jesus has 70 followers close enough that he trusts them to be sent out in pairs to heal the sick & announce that God has come near. 70 trusted preachers. 35 pairs of preachers telling the good news of

God. So telling the story is clearly not to be limited to the twelve disciples. The good news is meant to be shared far & wide by those who trust Jesus & follow him. This is a reminder to all of the followers of Jesus of every time & place. Sharing the good news is not just the responsibility of “professionals” like clergy. Sharing the good news is the calling of everyone who follows Jesus. Consider the assignment Jesus gives to the ones he sends. First, they are sent to cure the sick. Second, they proclaim that “the kingdom of God has come near.” It has been said that “you don’t throw a drowning person a sandwich.” Jesus sends the 70 out with not only words of comfort but with acts of grace as well. God’s people are sent out into the world to serve in the name of Jesus each time they gather for worship. In this gospel text we are again reminded that the gospel message is to be shared in more than just words. We share the message by welcoming others, sharing bread with the hungry, & offering compassion to the afflicted. Yet our baptism also reminds us that God has first come near to us in the life, death, & resurrection of Christ—a relationship that is like a mother comforting a child. The promise that God is near in Christ compels us to live faithfully & compassionately, wherever our journeys take us.

### **Theological Reflection**

There are 2 sides to hospitality: providing it & accepting it. Which one seems more difficult to you & to your community? Hosting obviously requires work, but being received as a guest is not necessarily easy either. A host is usually in charge of their environment; a guest may feel more vulnerable in an unfamiliar place. Jesus taught his disciples to be good guests: graciously accepting what is provided, staying in one place without shopping around, & accepting rejection without retaliating.

### **Worship Service Element**

Jesus taught his followers to begin each visit in a new place with an offer of peace. If the offer is rejected, no harm done. If the offer is accepted, then that person actually receives peace! It might not sound as impressive as casting out demons, the ability to grant peace is also a miraculous gift. Greetings with peace are mentioned in many places in the NT, & any or all of them may be in mind when the peace is shared during a worship service. "Peace be with you" is not just a polite expression or a kind wish—it is a statement that becomes reality.

### **Theological Reflection**

No matter how they were received, the 70 would end up saying the same thing in each place: "The kingdom of God has come near" (Luke 10:9, 11). For those who welcomed them, the kingdom of God was near. For those who turned them away, the kingdom of God was also near. How can the results be so different & yet also, somehow, almost exactly the same? Could it be that the kingdom of God is near whenever Jesus' followers are near? That is good news which doesn't depend on the reaction of the people who hear it.

## **Let the Children Come**

This weekend many in the United States & Canada celebrate Independence Day (July 4) or Canada Day (July 1) & may enjoy the summertime ritual of sitting down at a lake, park, or picnic table with family & friends. In the gathering space, set a table with picnic items & two signs. One sign says "Reserved." The other says "All are welcome." Today's gospel shakes up our thinking about borders & boundaries & reminds us to stay focused on the message of inclusion—and of giving & receiving hospitality.

### **[Luke 10:1-11, 16-20](#)**

This excerpt, an expansion on the sending of the twelve (Luke 9:1-6), fits better in the early church's missionary movement, when Luke wrote in the 80s, than during the lifetime of Jesus. However, in Luke's gospel, the 70 join Jesus in his journey. Some manuscripts read 72, some 70: both numbers carry several symbolic references. Not carrying a purse & not returning greetings suggest the urgency of the missionary task. Jewish dietary laws no longer have force (v. 9). The book of Acts continues Luke's theme that the disciples now have Jesus' power to heal & exorcize. The reference to the legend of the fall of Satan (see Rev. 12:9) both indicates Jesus' eternal knowledge & offers a religious framework to explain the exorcizing powers in the missionary movement. We proceed through the standard Sundays after Pentecost, gathered together, hearing the word, sharing the meal, & with the 70 apostles, sent out to proclaim Christ to the world. God as a mother will support & comfort us. We hear Luke's directions as applying, not only to ancient & contemporary missionary efforts, but to each Christian's proclamation of the kingdom. We now greet the world in peace, attend to the sick, & proclaim the word. Yet our pride & joy come not from our own successes, but from Christ's having conquered Satan.

As Jesus has sent out the twelve disciples on a missionary journey within Israel. he now sends others on a mission beyond, for “70” is the traditional Jewish number of nations of the world. The 70 are “like lambs into the midst of wolves” (v. 3): ([1](#)) they are defenseless before hostile people; & (2) Christ inaugurates an era of peace & reconciliation in which “the wolf & the lamb shall feed together” (Isaiah [65:25](#)). They need to commence without delay (“carry no purse ...”, v. [4](#)) & concentrate on the mission (“greet no one ...”). When you find a receptive person, a *person of peace*, God’s peace will be on him or her (v. [6](#)). Accept their hospitality (“the laborer deserves to be paid”, v. [7](#)) & “eat what is set before you” (v. [8](#), i.e. ignore Jewish dietary laws). Show by action (healing people) & by telling them the good news that “the kingdom of God has come near to you” (v. [9](#)): it’s partly already here! Vv. [11-16](#) tell the 70 how to handle hostile situations: tell such people that they will be ignored; the kingdom has come anyway. Then v. [16](#): in hearing the good news from a disciple, people hear Jesus; if they reject a disciple, they reject Jesus & the Father (“the one who sent me”). When the 70 return, they tell of their surprise that they have power over evil (v. [17](#)), a power Jesus has explicitly given to the Twelve. Jesus has seen their victory over evil forces; he has given them “authority” (v. [19](#)) over Satan (“the enemy”). (To Jews, “snakes & scorpions” were known sources of evil.) Exorcism, in itself, is not a sign of the arrival of God’s kingdom (v. [20](#)).

## Images in the Readings

Among the many images in today’s readings (the city, breasts, a river, grass, law, loads, reaping, harvest, family, circumcision, the cross, new creation, 70, journey, lambs, wolves, heaven) are these: During intertestamental times Judaism popularized an alternative explanation for the origin of evil, to which Jesus refers (v. 18). The sin of the first humans described in Genesis 3 only repeated among humankind the prior sin of the angels: some angels had wished to be like God, supported **Satan** in a rebellion, & after the “war in heaven” were expelled from the presence of God, going from the highest level of the universe to the lowest. For Luke, every instance of overcoming evil recalls God’s victory over Satan. The earliest developed theory of atonement proposed that Satan had thought that because Christ was crucified, evil had won out, but the resurrection established Christ’s victory over the forces of Satan. This theory is now more central to *The Lion, the Witch, & the Wardrobe* than to most contemporary theologians. In several biblical passages, **snakes** personify evil & incarnate the devil, perhaps because Canaanite religion depicted the goddess as a snake, whose shedding of its skin symbolized on-going fertility. Still today the aboriginal religion of Australia depicts the Creator deity as the Rainbow Serpent. God is like a **mother**. For

some Christians, this metaphor is disturbing, since it can be taken to contradict the traditional language of God as father. For other Christians, discovery of this passage is a gift of good news, the “gospel” reading for the day.

### Some Thoughts from the Text & For the Day:

- 1) Family/Neighborhood gatherings can be all “fine” until someone says or does the wrong thing & then the “fireworks” start. Jesus encourages us to first announce/live/present/cultivate a climate of peace. What & How is this done in your people groupings? Letting things go, not getting hooked, leaving the side comments sit there, considering who the person has shown themselves to be previously, not responding to the tone/barbs/passive-aggressive jabs are all part of that but what also helps build UP a sense of peace/calm/restfulness & safety with one another?
- 2) Avoiding certain subjects: politics, religion, money, sex, family secrets has long been a chosen method of avoiding topics that would ‘disturb/unsettle the peace’ of the gathering. Jesus is however bringing the Kingdom near and that means actively engaging in conversation, activities, discussions about values, choosing priorities that will recognize the challenges/difficulties/pain/realities of life and what might bring about healing or at least facing down the demons of fear, anxiety as we deal with life’s circumstances. Jesus is inviting/commanding us to do this because these ‘betterments’ to live and the world are more possible when we are aware that the “kingdom is near.” It is at those times we can be confident of calling on God’s name/presence and trusting that somehow God will be present.
- 3) Letting your peace “come back to you” means you remain calm, not tweaked/pinched, and you still wish others the best. Those things you say under your breath or snide remarks walking away are sure signs that you expected a transaction of good favor, you DID NOT truly offer a gift. Offering a gift of peace is still valuable even when the others do not receive it.
- 4) Role of Alcohol: This ‘grease’ for cultivating sociability can work both ways – relaxes inhibitions so laughter and feelings can flow more easily for many people. Sometimes these feelings/actions are better checked on the way being expressed – just be aware.
- 5) Curing the Sick includes but is most often more than an injury seen on the surface – the hurts people carry the longest are those that hurt the inside of us.

Truly learning how to listen – effectively, actively, responsively listening is one of the most effective treatments for hurts people carry inside of their heart/head and even body. First hearing, then ‘joining’ (letting them know you can understand their reality and are there with them in it – more than just saying those words you must be able to describe to them what their reality looks, feels, sounds, hurts like), then being a silent presence of hope or bring a blessing to be released from always seeing it the way they’re seeing it, or offering a solution they haven’t thought about before..... These and many others are all ways of helping release pain, find solutions and bring healing. Healing is what God already provides – we help by remove obstacles to it to do its own work (we don’t tell our bodies to clot, scab and scar over but we do clean out the wound).

- 6) Sharing the Word –means recognizing/somehow announcing/pointing to God in the midst of the good that is occurring in life.