

Year C, Pentecost 7

July 7th, 2019

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Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

“The Harvest is Ripe!”

Where do you start when you want to start a movement toward peace? Today’s gospel is a remarkably good place. It gives us clues on what Jesus had in mind when he sent out the original 70 disciples two by two. When he appointed his 35 pairs of people they must have been apprehensive. What did Jesus want them to do and what did he expect would happen? Since they were to go ahead of where he intended to go, he would be following them. That’s a little scary too—your Lord following you and seeing how you are doing. His itinerary included places in the country, towns; not just cities. Jesus could show up anywhere: family gatherings, homes of the sick, camp and places too small to have a name.

“He says to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful.’” I think he means you will find people ready and longing for these words of mine. Many are asking basic questions and searching for peace. They are all around us—everywhere we look! The time is right and the wheat is golden. It’s like when Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem wanting to get there in time for the Passover in order to demonstrate God’s gracious Passover for all human-kind. The time had come; the wheat waved golden brown in the wind. Human culture was ready for something different, something new, something that brings hope, promise and spiritual sustainability. We too are ready and participating in our own harvest as we search for ways of experiencing and communicating a truth we find ourselves both yearning toward and discovering.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” The world is in great need and ready for a change but we don’t have enough harvesters. There aren’t enough people living in a new way yet: a way different from the world around them. We need more change agents. Unless we have more laborers we won’t be able to bring the harvest in before it is too late. “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” I find this passage puzzling. Is Jesus worried that his message will not reach enough people to avert losing the crop—and what would losing the crop mean?

In late July the oats would ripen and turn golden brown on our farm. We had to harvest the oats before wind or rain knocked it down. Is Jesus afraid that his message of God’s peace toward all humans will not spread widely enough to prevent the human suffering we bring on ourselves in our jealousies, conflicts and wars? Maybe he was thinking about the destruction of Jerusalem and hoping that destruction could be averted if his message was disseminated widely enough. If so, Jesus’ worries were justified. Jerusalem was totally destroyed thirty years later.

Jesus has no answer to his own worry except to get going and do what he can and so he pushes the disciples out the door. He knows they don't understand the enormity of their project; that all creation groans as it waits for the word of peace to spread. Everything waits for peace.

"Go on your way," Jesus tells them, and "Remember, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." Do you remember how Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head?" It's a similar idea. This old world is not our home; we're just traveling through. The disciples going out ahead of Jesus are like the Lamb of God sent into the midst of wolves—it's not a friendly or peaceful place and they need to know that. He tells them to use no coercion and be as weak and powerless as lambs. Vulnerability is "the Jesus Way." Why has the church not listened? Could it be the crisis in Christianity, where sensitive and insightful people often call Christians hypocrites, is directly linked to our **not** listening to Jesus?

"Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road." Do these packing and traveling instructions strike you as odd? "Greeting no one on the road" strikes me as downright unfriendly. What does Jesus mean? Maybe greeting no one on the road suggests the mission is urgent. It's like a physician heading toward a desperately sick person. It reminds me of where Jesus said no one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is worthy of the kingdom of God.

But why travel so light? Can't we take our cell phones? We could have them equipped with mapping software to guide us to our destination. Jesus doesn't want us carrying anything that will serve as a barrier between us and those to whom we are going. He wants us to approach your brothers and sisters with nothing we can use to establish superiority or claim inferiority. This is a movement human to human with nothing by which we can concoct rivalrous hierarchy. We are God's children and equally loved. Relinquishing symbols of status will help us establish connections with each other that are non-rivalrous, peaceful and human. If we carry a bag we will rival each other over whether it is leather or straw, a Gucci or a gunny sack. So carry no bag. The shoes we take will cause us to be valued on the basis of who made them, Nike or some non-descript brand that reflects no glory; so take no shoes at all. All of this is an unnecessary and divisive encumbrance given the importance of our mission.

We come now to the reason we travel lite and avoid tarrying. We have a message of critical importance and we pronounce this message in every house we enter as best we can. It is a message in parallel to Jesus' first words spoken when he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. It is Jesus' most important message, the reason for his coming to earth, and the culmination of the story told in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. "Peace to you. Peace to this house!" This is the message we bring to every house when we go out as Christ's disciples.

Peace to this house and peace to the world. This is the sum and substance of Jesus' message. Jesus wants to give us his peace. It is a peace qualitatively different from any we have known before Jesus. It's not like the world's peace, built on exclusion, competition, coercion and the hiding of truth. This is a peace that includes all and takes away our fear of being cast out. Jesus doesn't want us to be afraid any more. When we have this kind of peace, even when we are as vulnerable as lambs among wolves we know God is beside us and Jesus has been here too. I think of the vulnerable children of the world who are living among wolves and pray they know God's peace. Even if they lose their lives they will still be in his hands.

This is the kind of peace he wants to give every home he enters and we bring it too when we go ahead of him. He sent the seventy out to demonstrate peace; a deep, all pervasive, "shalom" type peace that gradually incorporates every cell of our bodies. For many of us as his peace takes hold, we become calmer as we find ourselves rooted in a God quite different from the one we thought was out there and frowning.

Our entering into Jesus' peace gradually ushers us into a new creation where human boasting has no sway and rivalry, envy and jealousy no power. Even accomplished Paul said, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." This is the peace the Lord brings us and wants us to share with each other. As we abide in Jesus' peace his peace changes us. Thanks be to God. Amen.