

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost: July 3, 2016

The Episcopal Church of St. Mary the Virgin, San Francisco, CA

Text: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Title: Unburdened

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus sends seventy people out into the world to offer peace, heal, and proclaim the Kingdom of God. They are to "carry no purse, no bag, no sandals," to stay in whichever home is opened to them and eat whatever is offered, and to simply shake it off and move on when a place is not ready to welcome them. His instructions are clear, and there have been people who, like St. Francis, heard them and took them quite literally.

But my guess is that, for most of us, this seems more than a little extreme. We know that Jesus loves his disciples, and loves us. And yet here he seems to show little concern for what we might call our basic needs – the building blocks for human flourishing – things like safety, security, and consistent access to food, water, and shelter. He sends them out with *nothing* to fall back on; no money, no cell phone, no air bnb confirmation number. He sends them out without even the tools to rough it for a while – no tent, no bug spray, not even a modest supply of trail mix and cliff bars. Moreover, he sends them out with no special training for their mission, no directions, even, on where to actually go. Whereas we spend so much of our time and energy worrying about our bank accounts and our health, our jobs, education, and kids, where we stand in the world and what others think of us, a future over which we have very little control ... Jesus clearly has different priorities.

Apparently, those seventy had fewer reservations that I might were I in their shoes, and they went, and when they returned they spoke of the great power they had received. Interestingly, though, they did not speak about their journeys. Luke tells us *absolutely nothing* about how the mission went. We don't know what they thought as they left, how they felt when a door opened upon a friendly face or closed quickly in theirs, or what kinds of dinner conversation they brought with them. I struggle even to imagine it, and shudder to think of the early evangelists as traveling salesmen, going door to door with nothing to offer but their enthusiasm, maybe slipping the ancient equivalent of a pamphlet under a locked door.

But then I think, maybe it wasn't like that at all. Maybe they didn't try to sell Jesus, to push their beliefs, to prove they were right. Maybe they understood something the evangelists who have knocked on my door rarely seem to get ... something that is all too easy for us *all* to forget: that **everyone** has their own good news to share. Scholars have puzzled over who these 70 people were and where they came from, but almost all agree that the number is meant to symbolically represent all of humanity, echoing Genesis 10, where a list of all the nations appears, totaling 70.

Jesus does send us out into the world, totally disarmed, to share our deepest truths, but first, and over and over again, we are called to hear the good news of others, to receive them, maybe into our homes, maybe into our hearts, as we practice hospitality, share a meal, listen, and let ourselves be transformed.

One summer, when I was an even younger adult, I took a train from Cleveland, Ohio, to Portland, Oregon, where I met my sister, then a student at Stanford, and some old friends. We spent a couple weeks exploring the city and then planned a long journey home, with stops at a couple festivals along the way and lots of nights camping. Only we didn't have a car. Or much

money. And our parents didn't exactly know what we were up to. So we got rides with friends ... and some very new friends ... and for a little while all seemed to be going according to our loose plan.

After hiking along the Columbia River Gorge for a few days, we found ourselves at a gas station in a remote part of southern Washington. And it was there, as we stood in line to buy snacks, that we realized we had misplaced the bag in which we'd ever so wisely put all our money, our licenses, and all our other valuables. We sat outside under the hot sun for a few hours and made some calls on the payphone, more than a little panicked. Eventually, one of the mechanics, a young guy named Jason who was covered in oil and missing several teeth, came over and introduced himself. We chatted for a while, and explained what had happened. His girlfriend, Lacy, joined us, and eventually they offered to let us spend the night at their place.

Now, as at 31 years old with children of my own, I realize this sounds a bit like the first five minutes of an episode of *Criminal Minds*. But then, the prospect of a warm shower and a decent meal with these incredibly nice people, who so clearly had led such a different life than we had, was too good to pass up.

Jason and Lacy lived in a manufactured home smaller than my bedroom. We heated up canned peas and pasta on their hot plate, and stayed up late talking about our families, our lives, our dreams. We spent the night in our sleeping bags on the floor of their kitchen / living room / den. In the morning, they gave us a ride to a travel center and \$10 to help get home, which we realized was probably a great deal for them. I think of Jason and Lacy every time I think about hospitality. There we were, two foolish girls from the suburban Midwest. We didn't have anything dignified to share. We were not on a noble mission. But the opportunity to know one another – to share a meal, to share stories, and to be, even for a brief moment, neighbors – had a profound impact on me.

I think the hardest part about following Jesus is how vulnerable he asks us to be in the process. We learn from such a young age to be independent, to excel, and to be responsible, and these are very good things – often necessary things. But when these values are not balanced by a great deal of humility, by equally thoughtful support in learning to accept our weakness and imperfection, and loving others in their weakness and imperfection, we end up with hard hearts, rigid beliefs, and locked doors.

Jesus understood when he sent the 70 out that there is actually something more foundational to human flourishing than security, status, and wealth, and that is the raw, messy, and beautiful experience of human relationship. I think he knew that the only way his disciples could ever teach others about hospitality, mercy, compassion, about faith, hope, and love, was to go out and experience it for themselves. In the 15 years since that wild summer, any time I hear people make sweeping statements about the baseness of humanity, the impossibility of community, the decline of America, or everything wrong with “them” – whoever they are - I think of Jason and Lacy, and all the other people who helped us get home safely, asking nothing in return.

At least from time to time, Jesus says, carry nothing ... nothing that could get in the way of encountering a stranger as a brother or sister in Christ. Nothing that could make you see in your sibling an enemy, an other, an outsider. Unburden yourself from being so fiercely independent. In return, I really and truly believe, God does God's part, preparing the hearts of others to receive us and to share their own good news, even – maybe especially – when we least expect it, and most need it. **Amen.**