

July 3, 2016



“God's Kingdom Has Come to You”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

Luke 10:1-11

After this 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.’”

As great as it feels to be back in this pulpit this morning—and it truly does—I’m going to keep the homily brief. That’s a special gift to Jim Smith on his first Sunday back, who often tells me that every sermon and homily should be brief. It’s really because we’re carried today by our two sacraments—the joy of the baptism of Beau Quellmalz and the nurturing and empowering feast of Holy Communion. But truthfully—It may actually be because the vision in my left eye is still rather blurry and staring at a computer screen and making sense of what I’m typing is still a bit of a challenge.

That’s my jumping off point really, my own personal experience of vulnerability and limitation that comes to us all in various guises as we go through this life—whether it’s in our physical body or in a relationship or at the death of someone dear. When the things that seemed to sustain us are taken away or diminished, we are pushed deep into the foundation of our faith and our sense of self. There’s a gift in this, sometimes, in having less, a gift that draws us closer to the grace and the power and the promise of God.

This is why, I think, that when Jesus sends out the seventy, having sent the twelve, now seventy more, he commands them to go empty-handed, without even the most basic provisions necessary for the road. No purse, no bag, no sandals. These first apostles become vulnerable and acutely aware of their limitations. All the things they would normally have to help them negotiate the world, the external things and possessions that made them feel comfortable are gone. And with these things goes the false sense of self-assurance that things and possessions bring. They are no longer defined by what they have, what they have accomplished, or how successful they have been in making their own way in the world. By sending them out with nothing, Jesus is teaching them how to rely on the authority that comes from God alone and how to find the grace and joy inherent in being among those who bring good news to the world.

Jesus himself knows that to gain this perspective—on oneself, on God, on all that it means to bear witness to the Good News—everything must be re-framed. He has learned this from his own experience of going out into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, to confront Satan, yes, but more importantly to confront his own sense of self and to know in his bones, in his hunger and his thirst, his need of God, the true source of life and empowerment.

He knows how easy it is for us to forget this when we’re at the top of our game. When our closets are full of sandals and bags and purses and stuff. When we’re not anxious about where the next meal is coming from. When we’ve become too comfortable to want to risk the edgy places of what it means to live into the Kingdom of God in such a way that we make it real and visible for others

And so, in sending them out with nothing, Jesus creates for his first seventy apostles a humble and vulnerable wilderness kind of spiritual place in their spirit, so that they might also come to know God. And know that the only power they really have is the power given to share in the work of Christ.

What Jesus does give them is authority, his authority for the work of this mission. He sends them out in his own holistic mission for the salvation of lives and the transformation of the world. He sends them out, giving them authority to share peace and table fellowship, to cure the sick, to proclaim the kingdom of God.

But maybe—because of Jesus' own experience of going into the wilderness alone, by himself—he does things really differently when he sends out the seventy. The first twelve he had sent out two-by-two. He does so again, but this time sends seventy.

Seventy. That number seventy harkens back to the 10th chapter of the Book of Genesis in which all the nations of the world are named, and they number seventy. He sends seventy. That's thirty-five teams. And thirty-five teams sound pretty awesome when you're being sent out to proclaim and make visible the Kingdom of God for all the world.

Jesus knows that not everyone will be happy to hear what they have to say. Not every household will receive them with open arms. Not everyone will invite them to pull up a chair and eat and make themselves at home.

And so he makes sure that they are not alone in this mission. Each is one-half of one of thirty-five teams. That's a whole network of folks. A community of faith of which they are a part. You see, Jesus is already showing us here what church is about. Oh sure—we're each given power and authority in our baptism. But not by ourselves alone. And he's reminding us of our need of each other, which we feel that most keenly when we are vulnerable and needy and the task before us seems too big. We are not alone, but part of a great community of faith that spans backward and forward through time and now encompasses the whole of the world.

This is why we baptize in the context of the worship of the community of faith. It's to show Beau, before he can really take it in, that he's a special part of a big, beautiful, diverse, global, timeless family of faith, and that all together we are, with him, baptized Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ, apostles for the world. Sent out by Christ himself to proclaim peace, to share in a wide table fellowship, to heal brokenness of any kind and thus make visible the Kingdom of God.

Every baptism provides a great opportunity for each of us to remember our baptism and to give thanks for the church, the Body of Christ. It's a great opportunity to acknowledge just how very much we need each other. To remain generous, vulnerable, and humble, we need each other's love and prayer. To remain courageous, we need the prod of Scripture and the voice of the prophets. To remain joy-filled and hopeful, we need the promise of baptism and the sustenance of Holy Communion. To remain outward focused, we need the mission trips and community meals that stretch and grow us as we serve. To remain true, we need the fellowship and the laughter and the singing. To be faithful disciples, we need this great network of fellow disciples, called, named, blessed, sent out—the church.

As we prepare our hearts to receive the sacrament this morning, we give thanks to God for a savior who knows our every need, who hears our every prayer, who calls us into this great beautiful fellowship, a Savior who keeps us focused on the Kingdom of God and the things that make for peace. May this holy meal strengthen us to live into God's vision for the world as we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.