

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Lec. 14 – Proper 9 - July 6, 2025

New Song Episcopal Church – Coralville, IA

Isaiah 66 :10-14; Psalm 66:1-8; Galatians 6:7-16; Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

Pastor Jennifer Lutz

It was near the end of my second year in seminary. As my classmates and I gathered in the hall beneath the chapel, the tension in the room was so thick you could cut it with a knife. One of our professors began with words of encouragement and offered a prayer. Then a sealed white envelope was handed out to each student. Inside it was the name and location of our internship site. These were the places where we were being sent to serve as pastors-in-training for the next year. The paper in my envelope read Christ our Shepherd Lutheran Church – Peachtree City, Georgia. I remember running back to my apartment and pulling out a map to discover where this place was on the far outskirts of Atlanta.

Was I prepared for this? Sure, as much as a 27-year-old that looked all of 13 wearing a black clerical could be. I had been taught Hebrew, Greek, biblical history, theology, pastoral care, homiletics and liturgics – in other words, enough to navigate my way around the church, but equally likely to drive off a cliff if I wasn't careful. There were safety nets in place, of course – a pastor/mentor to guide me, a roof over my head and stipend for food and a loving congregation that understood its role in helping young seminarians grow into their calling. In the end, my year of serving alongside the people of Christ our Shepherd would be a gift and formative for my ministry.

As I read our gospel passage for today, I wondered what those 70 followers of Jesus felt as Jesus gave them their assignments. What was going through their minds and hearts as they found out which towns they would be visiting; especially when they received these very explicit instructions from their teacher?

“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. 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.”

Sounds easy, doesn't it? Don't take any provisions. Be completely dependent on these strangers to whom you go. Preach, heal people and exorcise demons just like Jesus does. By the way, when you are rejected not if you are, here's what you should do. In other words, this is not going to be a cakewalk. I wonder if these disciples of Jesus were courageous or foolish or naïve or inspired or all of the above?

The instructions Jesus gives his disciples here in Luke 10 and earlier in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter, sound very strange to our ears. Carry no staff, no purse, no bag, no sandals, not even an extra tunic. What the original recipients of this gospel would have understood was how these instructions from Jesus would have contrasted his disciples with the Cynic missionaries of his day.

Adherents of Cynicism, the Greek philosophical movement of this same era, sought happiness through freedom: freedom from desires and emotions, freedom from materialism, freedom from authority, religion and societal norms. In many ways, the cynics were anti-civilization. And they celebrated their self-sufficiency by carrying a staff as a wanderer, a ragged worn-out wallet and carrying all their possessions in a bag on their back.

In effect, Jesus was telling his disciples to do the complete opposite. Instead of being self-sufficient, the disciples were to rely on others and build relationships with those they met. They were to forge a new kind of peasant community much like the communities that Jesus was building when he gathered people at table for meals.

Unlike how society dictated who was greatest and least by their seat at the table and who wasn't allowed there at all, Jesus taught that all were welcome: the rich and the poor, the prostitutes and sinners, the stranger and the outcast, women alongside men. The disciples were to form communities of equality where all were valued, everyone's story was important, and where what affected one of them was a concern and was cared for by all.

Jesus taught his disciples to make two proclamations that would be key in bringing this kind of community together: 1) Offer to people the peace of God and 2) declare that the kingdom/ the reign of God has come near.

In some ways, these two sound like a simple greeting, a mere pleasantry as you come in the door and then something religious tacked on the end as you depart. But these words and the authority with which they are spoken carry far more freight. They are, in effect, performative words.

In speaking them, the disciples are creating something new.

Something is being brought into being that was not there before.

The person who receives these words, is ushered into a new reality.

The disciples offer others the peace of the Lord. This peace is not merely the absence of conflict. It is the Hebrew concept of shalom, meaning a sense of wholeness and well-being, It is a prayer that another person may be complete in body, mind, and spirit, that they may attain the fullness of who God has called them to be. To the one receiving this peace, these words carry the power of our Lord, the one who died and rose from the dead. When our Lord with his peace is present, he disrupt the powers-that-be that seemingly are

in control. With this peace, the reign of God, indeed, comes near.

What was in control, what was ruling a person's life, is now replaced by the rule and reign of God.

The reign of fear and anxiety is toppled by the reign of peace.

The reign of isolation, unworthiness, and loneliness is changed to the reign of welcome and acceptance. The reign of injustice and cruelty is replaced by the reign of mercy and compassion. Speaking our Lord's word of peace helps set these changes in motion. Our action becomes part of God's ongoing work of making the world anew, of bringing peace on earth and God's reign to all people.

These instructions that Jesus gave his first disciples are the same ones he gives us as he sends us out into the world to bear witness to our faith. We are called to share the peace of Christ with all those we meet as we move through our day. Through our words and presence, in the kindness and generosity we offer, through our advocacy and support for those in need, we offer peace and the reign of God comes near.

The truth is that there are as many ways to live and embody this peace as there are people. For example, Eddie, the music therapist at a retirement community where I work, Eddie embodies this peace despite the fact that he's so shy that he barely can say hello when I greet him in the hallway.

Eddie plays his guitar and sings with those in the care center, bringing them delight and stirring up wonderful memories.

As he sings and asks residents questions connected to the songs, a peace washes over them, distracting them from pain and anxiety, turning a bad day into a far better one. Through Eddie, I've seen the reign of God come near.

I have also this peace pop up in the news recently. Fernando Mejia, a Salvadoran national, has run his bagel shop in Port Washington, New York for years.

A couple of weeks ago ICE agents raided his business arresting him and treating him as a hardened criminal for simply lacking the proper documentation. In response, the entire town has rallied behind him, protesting his arrest and demanding that this vital member of their community be released. The people of Port Washington continue to this day to speak a word of peace to combat the reign of fear that has hurt Fernando and his family and gripped their community.

Our calling as followers of our Lord is to declare this peace anywhere & everywhere. It is needed now more than ever as so many people are overwhelmed by their fears. With the peace of our Lord dwelling in us, we do not have to be afraid. God now rules in our hearts. In turn, we can share this peace so that the reign of God can spread through us to others.

I leave you with these potent words from the theologian, Walter Brueggeman:

“The truth is that frightened people will never turn the world, because they use too much energy on protection of self. It is the vocation of the baptized, the known, named and unafraid, to make the world whole:

- The unafraid are open to the neighbor, while the frightened are defending themselves from the neighbor.
- The unafraid are generous in the community, while the frightened, in their anxiety, must keep and store and accumulate, to make themselves safe.
- The unafraid commit acts of compassion and mercy, while the frightened do not notice those in need
- The unafraid are committed to justice for the weak and the poor, while the frightened only see them as threats.
- The unafraid pray in the morning, care through the day, and rejoice at night, in thanks and praise, while the frightened are endlessly restless and dissatisfied.

So, dear people, each of you: Do not fear! I have called you by name; you are mine!”

May we too be unafraid and be filled with the shalom of God.

May we offer others this peace

and know that the reign of God has come near.