

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost: July 3, 2022.

Luke: 10.1-17

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. 2He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. 3Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ 6And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. 8Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ 10But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11‘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.’

16“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

17The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” 18He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. 19See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. 20Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

(not in today’s lectionary) 12 I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town. 13 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. 14 But at the judgment it will be more tolerable for

Tyre and Sidon than for you. 15 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades.

SERMON:

In the back yard...even weeding— the announcement “the realm of God is near you” feels pretty good. When our senses are assaulted by images of bombed out shopping malls, fleeing migrants baked to death in the back of semi trucks, and children in sub Saharan Africa starving while their leaders keep waging war, can we say the realm of God is drawing near?

When preachers talk about current events, we’re not trying to usurp Peter Mansbridge or Rachel Maddow. We are asking, “where is God in all of this?” “What does God’s realm look like?” “What is God calling us to do and be?”

We commit ourselves to the hard questions. Is the story of Jesus sending his followers out into a dangerous world armed only with the Good News of God’s love OUR story...or do we toss it into the basket labelled ‘arcane’ alongside cubits, ephods, and Philistines?

Spoiler alert: This is our story—the story of Christ followers then and now.

It’s significant that Jesus recruits a large and diverse group to deliver his message just as he himself has set his face to go into Jerusalem. The twelve have already been on a similar advance tour and now seventy prepare to go.

Jesus knows what’s at the end. And he sends people anyway. He knows his fate is all but sealed. And he goes there anyway. Luke peppers us with details signalling urgency...don’t bother googling Travelocity for the best accommodations and skip the luggage. Just go. By the way, people are likely to ignore you or possibly even mistreat you. Just go. So seventy went. People were healed. Not even these travellers expected to witness God’s love overcome the unseen powers that tormented people. But they did.

God comforted and healed people—it was like that third volume of Isaiah had come to life...people who had it bad for so long were nourished and comforted.

You're already connecting the dots between the Gospel story, the prophet's vision and what church is up to. Several commentators remind us that when there's pushback, we don't change the message. We keep moving. We keep saying that the realm of God is drawing near.

Here's where we need to be really careful as church—when we are convinced we know EXACTLY what that realm is and we think we're in charge of set up, things go sideways. To those who cheer the clawing back of human rights in the US as God's design, I offer the quote by the theologian Leslie Newbegin—"Beware of trying to bring down heaven to earth. You risk dredging up hell from beneath."

Jesus isn't calling us to parrot a slogan and leave it at that. When we say the realm of God has come near, we draw clues from what Jesus does with that on the way to Jerusalem...and what he does when he gets there. God's realm is all about healing, feeding, teaching, loving and forgiving...It's about love having the last word even when the powers that be try to kill it and crucify God's embodiment of love; Jesus.

A teacher of ours used to say that because love has the last word, we have better things to do with our lives than to preserve them. One of his prized students, Dr. Anna Madsen likes to say this is the Good News distilled- and

"Those words call me out, set me right, and set me free every single time".

*(from a facebook conversation. Anna directs the OMG Centre for Theology and the Spent Dandelion Retreat Centre).

So, to borrow a title from a popular TV show. This is Us. We can remember the daily reality of our baptism into Christ's life. The church baptizes us in

Christ's name and reminds us of our call to proclaim him in word and deed, to care for the world God made and to work for justice and peace.