

Pentecost VII – Proper 9 – July 3, 2016

2 Kings 5:1-14

Psalm 30

Galatians 6:(1-6)7-16

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Risky Business

A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Port Townsend, WA.

Jesus sent them out. We don't know much about seventy. We don't know their names or their previous occupations, only that they were followers of Jesus... and that their lives had been changed by the experience. A closer reading of the Greek reads that Jesus did not merely "send them out"... Jesus "cast them out"... like a mother bird nudging her young ones out of the nest into the big wide world, where there would be great challenges. The seventy would be vulnerable... Jesus did not provide any sort of equipment to help them on their journeys... in fact he "de-equipped them." "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals"... there were no business cards to carry, no clip boards to hold, no pamphlets to present when the workers felt unsure of what to say. The seventy were "the message." They had no diploma or certificate as evidence of their competency and authority for the work they had been given to do. Jesus' parting advice to the 70: "do your work with caution." Don't greet anyone on the road. It is dangerous out there! Hospitality is a potent force in an inhospitable world. Make your way to a house. If hospitality is offered to you, receive it. Development of trust between visitors and their hosts is essential. If the message of "peace" is received stay... talk... eat what you are given... be healers and reconcilers and let those whom you visit know that God is so very near. Help your hosts to feel God's presence, and yes, it is you who embody that message. There will be those who have no interest in God's bigger picture, no interest in God's shalom. When you are not welcomed... let the inhospitable ones know, too, that God is near and is yearning for a relationship. You you bring the God's message to the world by meeting people where they are. You cannot force an awareness of God on those whose hearts and minds are tightly locked. Let the inhospitable know that they have missed out on a great gift, shake off the dust that should have been washed away when you entered the house. No matter, continue on your way... keep the faith... do the work that has been set before you. The instructions, the orders, are to **get to work!** The work is going to be tough, it is going to be risky and it is a huge job with very few visible rewards! I don't know about you, but I would have liked more training! Yet, Jesus is fully confident that the seventy have all that they need. They would learn as they go, and God would be with them. And...oh, yes dear workers...don't forget to accept the hospitality that is given you... even if you are served your least favorite food, even if the plate before is filled with of okra, lima beans and mounds scraggly little green sweet gherkins. Eat as if you have been served the finest meal in a four-star restaurant. It is not about the food dear ones, it is about building relationships and the gift that you are offering up is meant to feed the world's greatest hungers. It is easy to feed those of your own flock, those who look like and act like you and have a common understanding. Offering God's love in a hostile environment is much harder. All that you will take with you is the love of Christ... and that is more than enough. Faith is not a private matter. Break bread with God's beloved, even when it feels difficult and challenging.

The seventy go out, and when they return they are overjoyed... their work was more profound that they had thought it would be... They reported that demons submitted to them when Jesus' name was invoked, to which Jesus did not lift an eyebrow. He brought the crew back down to earth. It is not power that is the reward. Dear ones...be glad, rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. That is all the reward that you need.

The preacher David Sellery has written of today's lesson:

Jesus is telling us that love among the lambs is easy. Love among the wolves is hard. So what to do? The love of Christ is all we have. But it is more than enough, if we work at it every day. He calls us to make a simple one-on-one transaction. When hated, we love. When insulted, we love. When slandered, we love. That is what Christians do. We love the persecuted and the persecutors. Each one of us is the custodian of Christ's love. We live in it. We build it. We must share it... with the lambs and with the wolves. That's why we are here.¹

Doing God's work in the world is fraught with risk. We could fail. We could feel like fools. We could be misunderstood and rejected. Our commission is to let the world know that our God is the God of peace and justice. Our God who calls us to life and healing and reconciliation, is oh-so-close. How best do we accomplish this mission in the world? Let's talk about the dreaded "E" word... the word that upon hearing it... makes Episcopalians and many other Christians break out into a cold sweat and want to bolt for the hills. The dreaded "E" word is: EVANGELISM... Let me tell you a story about what evangelism is not.

One Sunday as I was getting out of my car, dressed in full Sunday gear, collar and all, I saw my neighbor across the street was working in her yard. I see her maybe a few time a year. She paused from trimming and said rather jokingly: "So did you save many souls today?" It was a moment of neighborly engagement that begged a humorous response: "Yes, of course I did! I saved one soul for sure, maybe even two!" We were being playful about the stereotype that is too often is associated with evangelism: moving a soul from the "unsaved" column in the ledger into the "saved" column, and, all the while, keeping track of the total "wins" keeping track of the score. And what would my work of "saving a soul" entail? Getting someone to profess that Jesus is their savior? Scheduling a baptism? Handing out a pledge card? I much prefer the advice of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of *The Little Prince*. He said:

If you want to build a ship don't drum up your men to collect wood and give orders and distribute the work...teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

Consider the possibility that the work of evangelism is meeting the world's great hungers... for peace... and justice... and, literally, food for empty bellies... consider that one of the most basic hungers, for each and every person, is to be seen, to be recognized as a person of worth and integrity. This past week I watched a video that was painful. The video recorded how people responded to a young girl who was first dressed in tattered clothes, appearing homeless. That girl was essentially invisible to the people who walked past her. She was ignored. She was not seen. The same girl was then dressed "up" in pretty clothes. She wore a fancy dress and coat, and she had on shiny new shoes. In the second situation the very same girl was a magnet for attention and complements. There was only one difference between the two segments. Where is the hunger in that story?

¹ Reflection by The Rev. David Sellery, "Love Among the Wolves." <http://us6.campaign-archive.com/?u=dbffd2070718c7bb6a1b9b7e0&id=49c7bb7da6>

Yesterday the world learned of the death of Elie Wiesel the Auschwitz survivor, author, scholar and Nobel Peace Prize winner. His life mission was to feed another hunger by telling, and retelling the raw truth of the horrors of the Holocaust, as well as stories the humanity that witnessed and experienced in the the world's darkest days. Wiesel vowed, always, to keep alive the memories of those who perished... for to forget them would be to let them die all over again. Wiesel was drawn to write, and speak, and remind the world that even in the most forlorn places... we are the embodiment of God's presence and message. Wiesel has written:

*Peace is our gift to each other.
 Hope is like peace. It is not a gift from God. It is a gift only we can give one another.
 "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference.
 The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference.
 The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference.
 ... the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference."*

Wiesel's God is the same God that Jesus came to show us. Wiesel's work was God's work. He devoted his life to laboring for God, by reminding us that we are the ones who have been equipped and empowered as agents of God's fervent desire that we live into a better way, and not to sit idly in a state of indifference.

To live and work faithfully is to offer God's bigger picture, a picture that is beyond our selves, beyond our time. In faith we believe that God is drawing us into a new way of being in relationship with one another and with with creation... A way of being that is beyond that which we have known in the past, and far greater than we can image in this moment. In God, the fears and frustrations, may at at first glance seem paralyzing yet, in God, fears are cleared the way to welcome a new way of being, a new way of living together... and not in spite of our differences, but because of them. This new way of being is not about the idolization of rugged individualism. This new way of being is about marshalling the gifts and strengths we have as individuals, and then working together, two by two, and as a team and as a community that is blessed with a richness of perspectives, voices and life experiences, and, most importantly a knowledge and experience of the love of God.

If you want to build a ship don't drum up your [people] to collect wood and give orders and distribute the work...teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

That is our mission... to meet people where they are and help instill a hunger for God's dream... to help those whom we meet experience... and feel... God's closeness and to sense God's yearning for each and every one of the beloved. Share food, swap stories, build relationships.

The 16th century Spanish Carmelite nun and mystic St. Theresa of Avila wrote:

*Christ has no body on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours.
 Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out to the world.
 Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.
 Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.*

A friend and mentor of mine from Pennsylvania, Kent Ira Groff, says it this way:

*How do you share Good
News?*

*How do you spread
Light?*

Make friends.

Do good.

Break bread.

*Risk and pray till others ask
the source.*

May we continue to be strengthened in all ways, and then... with joy... go forth from this place as witnesses and workers for the sake God's urgent yearning, to help feed a hungry and hurting world and to be bearers of God's peace and healing... We do so in the name of Christ, the one who has conquered death and calls the world to new life. You are not alone, and the rewards are great.

Amen...