

Sermon
St. Mary's Nanoose
July 3, 2016.
Luke 10:1-11,16-20
Being sent out into the World

This morning's gospel reading from Luke is chock-a-block full of interesting and challenging messages. The message today is in direct contrast to last week's, when we heard about all the excuses people made as on one hand, they say they want to and will follow Jesus, yet seemingly can't until they do "one last thing." They let their past keep them tied down and so were unable to freely follow Jesus. Do you remember the plowing metaphor Jesus used? It was his way of illustrating how hanging onto the past makes it impossible to move forward without stumbling. We can't follow Jesus if we are looking back to our past. Our future lies with him; we can't really know where we're going so we need to follow in trust.

Today's reading starts with 70 people obviously willing to face the future and head out into the unknown. These people have dropped the excuses. They are willing to be appointed by Jesus and to follow him. They are instructed, "go without possessions, open and vulnerable" - no extra stuff - "just in case." They are to head out in trust. And where are they being sent? "To every town and place where Jesus himself intended to go." So while they are to follow Jesus, at the same time, they are to go out ahead of him. Interesting!

How will they head out? In pairs. They are not being sent out alone. And lastly, what are they tasked to do? To go out and proclaim, “The Kingdom of God has come near,” and to bless everyone they meet by sharing God’s peace..

The message is the same for us. We are asked to go out into the world. Where Jesus himself intends to go. And as it was with Jesus and his followers 2 thousand years ago, some folks will accept us, and some folks will not. Some will be ready and willing to hear our message, others will not. Jesus explicitly reassures us that when others reject our blessing, “nothing will hurt us,” and the Peace we have offered will return to us. He reminds us that the rejection of a blessing is not personal, it is a rejection of God, and the acceptance of a blessing is not personal, it is the acceptance of God. We are in God’s territory, it is God’s harvest, and if we accept God’s mission, we can be God’s labourers. Our work is to head out into the world, offer God’s blessing and God’s reassurance, be gracious guests, and not take people’s responses to us, either positive and negative, personally.

So how might we be being called out as the people of St. Mary’s to participate in God’s mission for the world today?

It’s tempting to sit in church and wonder where all the people are; to reminisce about the good old days when people came to church in droves. But this is a new day, a new age and we have to open our hearts and minds to how the Holy Spirit is instructing us

today through this reading from Holy Scripture. It seems clear enough that we are being called to go out into the world; the days of having people come of their own accord and fill the pews seem to be over. We need to venture out beyond these walls and beautiful windows. Out beyond our comfort zone. Of course we will return each week to be fed by the Word and Eucharist but the Good News isn't reaching people – that seems amply clear - and the world is thirsty for the Good News.

But here's the twist. Our heading out is not a one-way thing. We're not just told to go out and share the Good News. This reading is very clear about this. Within this reading and so many others in the New Testament is the notion of reciprocity. As we head out into the world to offer God's blessing and the Good News, we are told to be prepared *to receive*. To receive the hospitality of others; we read we are to remain in their homes and eat what we are offered. We are to go where we are welcomed; where people are open to what we have to offer, and then we are to be open to what they have to offer *us*.

I think back to my honeymoon. Jim and I were married in Toronto and for our honeymoon; we rented a car, packed up our camping gear and took a month to travel through the part of the world that contained Jim's history. This led us through the eastern seaboard of the United States, visiting his family and friends along the way. But our destination was Appalachia where Jim had been

ordained in the Roman Catholic Church spending two years with the mountain people who won his heart and changed his life. I had watched the movie “Deliverance” and was just a little suspicious of his enthusiasm for the people. I was a little fearful.

When we finally arrived at Bud and Bertie’s, we pulled up in front of a very simple three-room home in a holler; a thin valley in the coal mountains of Virginia. “Are you sure it’s OK that we arrive without warning?” I asked Jim nervously as we parked the car. I knew my family would be put out if people just arrived without letting us know. “It’s fine,” Jim assured me. When the door opened to our knock, Jim was pulled off his feet in a big bear hug by Bud. “Jimmy’s here!!” he announced with a big grin. I was introduced and received a warm hello. “Do you sing?” Bud asked me. I started in with a modest response but Jim cut me off. “Of course she does.” Bud grabbed a guitar and we sat at the kitchen table with one of Bud’s teenage daughters, his wife, Bertie and Bertie’s mom, Granny. And we sang. For at least an hour. In between songs, we heard stories. And we were asked questions. They were so touched that Jim and I had come to share the good news of our marriage.

And then it was dinner time. I could tell these were folks without money. The tiny home was roughly finished. There were gaps in the walls. Dinner was simple. But the feeling in that room was rich. It was wonderful. I was already feeling part of the family.

Bud couldn't get over the fact that Jim was there. He kept beaming at him.

And then it was time for bed and we were offered Bud and Bertie's bed in the one bedroom. I protested, "No, no, it's too much - we can't put you out of your own bedroom!" But Bertie insisted. "It's your honeymoon - nothing but the best for you two!" I kept resisting until Jim stopped me by applying firm pressure to my arm. Later, when we were lying in bed he said, "Look, this is what these people have to offer us - hospitality. Don't resist it, accept it." And I did. It was a strange but not at all unpleasant experience to be fully included in this family's life. We had planned on staying 2 days. But Bud insisted we stay at least for the Tri State Gospel Sing. Again, we announced our departure. "No," Bud insisted, "We still have to visit that old friend up the holler." And so it went. They would not let us leave. They would not let us contribute food. They would not let us do a lick of work. We were guests and were treated like royalty. The only thing required of us was that we sing. Often. And we did.

Finally after a week, we plotted our departure. Not because we wanted to leave, but because we had to get back to jobs and life in Canada. So one day, when everyone was out of the house, and Jim and I found ourselves alone, we quickly packed up the car, left a note, and drove out of Derby Holler.

I learned a big lesson from this experience; one I've had to learn over and over again. Hospitality isn't about how neat your home is or how elaborate the meal you're planning to serve is, it's about the joy you show when guests show up to grace your home and you get to spend time with them, learn from them, and show them your world. And mostly, you get to lavish them with your attention and love.

My father knew how to do this in the simplest way. When we would go to visit my parents as a young couple with two little children in tow, we would ring the doorbell and hear my father yell out, "They're here!" We'd hear his footsteps as he hurried to the door and yanked it open. And then he would make this little gesture that would make my heart sing. He would rub his hands together and smile as if to say, "Ahhh, this is so good, you're here, let the fun begin!" I always felt so welcomed and loved in that moment.

When we venture out into the world to bring the good news, we are going to be changed. That's what reciprocity does. When we enter into the divine work, we are going to be challenged and gifted in ways we can't imagine. And we have to learn not to impose our ideas onto the world, we have to be vulnerable and allow others to touch us, teach us and receive us in ways we've never imagined possible. And we have to learn not to take people's reactions personally. Jesus met with resistance. He met with inhospitality

and violence. But he also was met with great openness and love. So it will be for us. In either case, we will be changed. We will grow. And life will be different. And the rest is up to God.

This being sent forth is vulnerable work. Jesus said, "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." Whoa! Who wants to do that?! And who are these wolves, anyways? I think we each know both animals well. We all have both the wolf and the lamb within us. As one wise elder said, "Whatever we feed is what will grow in us. If we feed the wolf, we will be angry aggressive people. If we feed the lamb, we will be vulnerable and open." Poor wolves. I don't really like personifying animals in this way but you get the point. We are being asked to be vulnerable, willing to trust, to be open to whatever God has in store for us. We are being asked to leave our comfort zone, to offer what we've been given to offer and to receive what will be offered us.

As we take time to relax and enjoy this summer season, I encourage us all to consider the question, "How are we, as the community of St. Mary's, being called out into the world to spread the Good News?" and in the early Fall, we will come together to discover how the Holy Spirit has been speaking to us.

In the meantime, this morning let us receive with open hearts what is offered us at this table of Peace and Plenty.

Amen.

