

4 Pentecost C

Isaiah 66:10-14

Psalm 66:1-19

Galatians 6:1-16

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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Grace and peace to you from our loving God.

This gospel reading might be just about one of the most terrifying gospel readings for Lutherans. You know how sometimes when you're in a meeting and somebody asks for a volunteer – what happens? Everybody realizes that they forgot what shoes they wore that day. They looked down, avoiding any possible chance of eye contact. And this text, which seems to imply the means for us engage in the E-word, terrify us because we don't think we know how to do it period

And the e-word that I'm talking about is evangelism. But hold on, don't run for the doors just yet, because I don't think this text is necessarily about evangelism. And, I'm not about to challenge you to pair up and go tell people about Jesus [not that that's about idea!]

This passage from Luke isn't so much about evangelism, telling people about Jesus, as it is about *living* as God's beloved people.

It's always a challenge to i) understand God and ii) understand who we are as God's people. Like any relationship, it is a process of growth, learning and exploration, a process that has no "end point," no "completion date," but continues to adapt and change. And in the midst of our remedial learning, God is patient and persistent, constantly drawing us close, repeatedly revealing the love and care that makes God who God is!

Relationship is the desire of God, the work of Jesus, and the directing of the Holy Spirit. I've often said that right from the very beginning, when God created two people (not just one)

that the intent was for us to live together as community. When Jesus began ministry, he called the twelve Apostles to help him, he healed people to restore them to their place in the community, he spoke to women and children so they would know that they are valued – all ways that Jesus challenged practices and attitudes that aimed to create division. And so when Jesus sends out a whole bunch of people, he is asking them to simply be the presence of God, among others in order to build relationships!

And they go! To every town and place where Jesus was planning to go, they went ahead to prepare the people for his coming. To Samaritans, Jews, and Greeks they go, announcing that *the reign of God has drawn near*. They go, two together, building bridges with peace and openness, tearing down walls of assumption and culture, healing old divisions. It was a very intentional exercise of hospitality to restore the value and dignity of anyone they met.

The concept of hospitality was of paramount importance to the Jewish community. As we might imagine, with no hotels, restaurants or Tim's on every corner, it was up to the community to welcome and care for strangers, travelers and visitors. Hospitality, when rightly practiced, moves aside the ego and its self-dependence (which says, "I can look after myself; I don't need anyone) and at the same time melts away the fear or uncertainty we feel in encountering the stranger. It's a two-sided learning as guest and host learn the rhythm of give and take between them.

And that exchange, that give and take, that moment of two people learning about one another, discovering trust and need and gift is exactly the place and time we learn about and experience God.

We all know that getting to know God is a challenge – just ask any two people and you know you'll get two different answers.

God however, isn't best understood through doctrine or books or rules or policies. So, if that isn't how we come to know God, then where or how?

This is why Jesus sent the seventy-two out to discover! Instead of asking them to read a book or memorize Bible passages or write a paper, Jesus invites them into an experiential journey. Go meet people, see where they live, share with them, eat side by side with them, talk, get to know each other, heal those you can, be compassionate instead of judgmental, and don't worry if they're not like you – because they won't be! Even for those who would refuse the invitation, who lived in fear and would reject these messengers, Jesus says *just move on*, perhaps understanding that some people simply wouldn't be ready.

And we know that they found God, because when they returned they were so excited! Out of the Synagogues and into the neighbourhood they discovered things about God they never imagined. We might be quite impressed at their report upon their return. We may not be able to imagine demons obeying us, but we can grasp the idea that as relationships are built the things that weighed us down are lifted! We may not be able to imagine Satan falling like lightning, but we do know that as we learn about others misunderstanding and assumptions are overcome. We might not have to worry about snakes and scorpions here in Alberta, but we can agree that harsh realities around us are lessened when we know our neighbours. And the enemy? As we become God's love in the world the forces of hatred and division are erased. When these seventy-two returned, they are filled with excitement, but they had only discovered what was within them all along - God wasn't just with them, but in them. As Jesus says, the reign of God has come near - you can't get much closer than that.

Now, if you want to experience that level of excitement – no, you don't need to go and evangelize. But I want you to

understand that that same presence of God is within us. Which means we need to stop looking for an otherworldly figure, a hero-endowed god that is at our beck and call through prayer, or a futuristic god who is waiting like a wallflower at the junior high school dance for us to die and discover the promise of eternal life. God is here. God is now. God is forever.

This is the God the world needs. A God who is willing to walk out and cross the street to the child crying in a detainment camp. A God who is willing to change the ways of entitlement for a few and work for justice and equity. A God who won't tolerate apathy while Creation suffers. This is the God the world needs, and *this is the God who dwells within us.*

Every time we dare to move outside our comfort zone or assumptions or privilege or fear we embark on a journey to know more about ourselves and the One who created us. Every time we begin to see a *person* instead of a *statistic* or a *label*, we are proclaiming the nearness of God.

Living faith isn't simply a theoretical idea. It is hard and challenging work that molds and shapes us. In Galatians we hear part of the story of some early Christians who were on this journey. It was hard for them to let go of their old ways and they made a lot of mistakes. Paul encouraged them to keep trying, to forgive along the way, to help one another, to be responsible for their actions and at the same time to work together.

It sounds like a recipe for any generation. We, as God's people today, are called to embark on a journey in fresh ways that will enable us to see this incarnate holiness. Sometimes, when you're coping with something terrible, you might say something like, "where is god?" Or, as we witness terrible things from around the world we might wonder, "how could god let that happen?" In those moments, be reminded that this is a God of love. When a friend comes to comfort you, God has come. Or

when people of the world work together in response to war or natural disasters or any other such thing, God has shown up in that crowd. God comes through us to build a world of grace and hospitality for all.

As you can see, the path of this work however, isn't linear. There is no simple beginning or end. It is a way of *life*, a way of *being* not only for ourselves, but as a beloved community. Amen.