

Luke 10:1-20e

Meeting the Challenge

Have you ever prepared for something that you knew would be exciting, interesting, even life changing, but there was also fear and trepidation to go along with all of that?

I think of the first time I left home to go to college. I was barely eighteen and headed to Red Deer, eight hours away from my parents by car. This was a time before cell phones and I would be making the trip alone. I knew no one in Red Deer, was feeling pretty intimidated by the responsibilities I would be taking on as I was going to live on my own in an apartment and going into a program of music that I barely felt qualified to participate in.

It was an exciting time, but being a somewhat timid teenager, I was also overwhelmed by how quickly and drastically my life was changing. I will be the first to admit that I messed up a few times. I made new friends, but also had to learn to negotiate how to be in relationship with these people who knew nothing of where I grew up, nor I them. I remember when my rent cheque bounced. It wasn't because I didn't have the money to put in the bank, but rather because I had neglected to make sure it got in the bank on time. All of it was a learning. It was exciting. I was stretching and growing in who I was, but it also came with hazards of loneliness, mistakes, and many fears.

I could relate stories throughout my life that have been both exciting and unnerving to say the least and I am hopeful that you too have been able to recall something similar, whether it be going away for post-secondary education, starting a new job, moving, beginning a family, or...fill in the blank.

It is into this kind of situation that Jesus sent seventy of his followers to every town and place that he intended to go in the days, weeks, and months to come. These must have been exciting times and yet, what a daunting, even fearful task to be asked to take on.

The men and women were asked to travel light and get going. There was a sense of urgency about what they were to do. They were doing the prep work, or setting the ground work for what was to come. Not sure if any of you had picked up on this story before, I know it has not been one that I turn to for instruction, but there is importance in the task and that is something to pay attention to. As followers of the Christian faith, we too should be doing this prep work, this ground work for Jesus to be introduced into people's lives. And we don't need to carry a burdensome load with us. As we will see, it is very much about hospitality.

Those sent out in Jesus' time brought peace with them. They offered that peace to any and every home that they entered. They were sent to bring peace, to teach, to heal, and

to announce that the kingdom of God was near to every person. It was so near that it was on their doorsteps if they choose to accept it.

This was what those sent out offered to others, but the hospitality was reciprocated in homes when the seventy were welcomed. It was over meals, in conversations, the nearness of God was embodied in the moments of shared hospitality. This was not a forced hospitality. If people were not welcomed, they were to turn and walk away. The scripture reading in this regard sounds unforgiving, hostile even, but this was to underscore the importance of the mission. I hear the words, “your mission, should you choose to accept it...” and we always know that the Mission Impossible team is up for the danger, the challenge, and the excitement.

Sometime it feels like what God is calling us to do is an impossible mission especially in the climate of a post Christian world, where things no longer move with the rhythms of the church, where Sunday is no longer a sacred day of rest. Money and what money buys have more bearing on a person’s motivations and choices than growing in faith and sharing the love of God with others. Having said that, this was what these first people faced who went out to share with others the peace and healing of God’s kingdom. Our circumstances are not that different in that the world does not know about God and the love of God and we are being called out to share it, to let others know that the kingdom of God is near.

Given what kingdoms, power, and colonization has done in the name of the Christian faith does pose challenges. What we see happening south of our borders and even within Canada in the name of God is also challenging. Actions on the part of many Christians, well-meaning Christians, loving Christians, has been to bring the peace of God and force it on everyone rather than doing what Jesus said to do, just leave if you are not heard or welcomed. Shake the dust of the town off your feet and go to where the message of grace and peace will be welcomed. Our work it to introduce people to God’s love, God’s idea of hospitality, where conversations are had, meals share, healing of body, mind, and spirit are part of the work.

How God deals with the rejection of the message of grace is not our concern. We rejoice in the healing, welcoming, loving work of the Spirit. Yet we can rejoice when we see God at work through us, but as Luke writes, “The great triumph is not in your authority over evil, but in God’s authority over you and presence with you. Not what you do for God but what God does for you – that the agenda for rejoicing.” (v20).

So there is urgency to share the message of grace in the world and you don’t need to look far to see when the grace is needed, in shelters for homeless and those who are beaten down, in homes where families are estranged or angry, in the halls of power where decisions are made that affect all, but impact most those who have little power to defend or challenge decisions. God’s grace is to be shared on the streets, in line ups at airports and drive throughs.

We have the privilege of bringing Good News of forgiveness, peace, joy, and love to those who may not know it. Each time you walk out your door, or even when you enter back into your home, you have the privileged and opportunity to change someone's world because you share in hospitality that is reciprocal. This is not about us bringing something to the table and others have nothing to offer. It is about sharing the stories of Jesus and message of God's love, but it is also about receiving the good others bring to our encounters and into our lives.

Jesus sent people out and they returned back to him. Their stories and experiences would have included things that went wrong, the times that they were rejected, but also the amazing experiences of how God's kingdom, that kingdom of love, grace, and hospitality was received and how hospitality was reciprocated, how healing happened, and there was rejoicing.

We know that this is hazardous work. We will be as vulnerable as sheep in a wolf pack, but the reward of witnessing the life changing work of God in people and communities far exceeds the challenges.

May God's peace go with you and with us in community as we go out from the safety of this time of worship and share with others the news that God's kingdom is near to them, with the love of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and God's grace going with us. Amen.