

The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
July 7, 2019  
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Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend

2 Kings 5:1-14  
Psalm 30  
Galatians 6:7-16  
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Jesus didn't always do a great job selling the upsides of becoming a follower:

"Someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said ...,  
'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has  
nowhere to lay his head.'"

Another seemed willing to come along even so, but wanted bury his father first.  
"Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead ...'"

And he sums it up, saying:

"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Now if you were here last week – and if you were paying careful attention last week – you may wonder that I start with these words. We heard all this here a week ago.

But I start there because I think the point carries over into this week. Our preacher last week, our own Marianne Borg, cautioned us about "the peril of looking back" ... how clinging to our comforts and our traditions and "what we've always known" can be impediments to our welcoming a world of possibilities not yet dreamt of.

That point carries over. Except whereas last week Jesus was calling disciples to follow him, this week he's sending apostles out ahead of him.

And he is sending them out with urgency ... so much so that he gets ahead, even, of himself. (At least that's how I imagine the scene.) Jesus sends the seventy out in pairs. That's the first verse. And then, before they're out the door, he calls them back. He tells them to pray for "laborers" and then he tells them that they are themselves the very answer to that prayer.

I quite like the way Eugene Peterson puts it:

*What a huge harvest! And how few the harvest hands. So on your knees; ask the  
God of the Harvest to send harvest hands.*

*On your way!*

"On your knees" translates immediately to "On your way!" Don't just pray for a new world that is not yet imagined. Do your part to make it so.

And as they start to head out, Jesus calls them back again and impresses upon them the urgency of it all. Again, as Eugene Peterson says:

*Travel light. Comb and toothbrush and no extra luggage. Don't loiter and make small talk with everyone you meet along the way.*

They're on a mission. So once they find a place to stay, he tells them to stay there and not to waste time looking for better accommodations with better food. And if they fail to find a place to stay in one town, shake off the dust of that place and move on. No looking back.

And he tells them what to say. The script he provides is so deceptively simple:

*Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!"*

Deceptively simple, I say, because Jesus tells them to offer their word of peace before they do anything else: before they make any sort of assessment as to whether the people living there deserve a word of peace; before they have time to determine whether they're good people, the sort to follow laws; before they know if a word of peace will fall on deaf ears and be welcomed; before they know if their offer of peace will be reciprocated or rebuffed.

And what makes this so very remarkable is that the instruction to begin with a word of peace follows directly on the heels of a scene so shocking as to be almost laughable. We heard it last Sunday. Some messengers were going out ahead of Jesus on that occasion. They entered a Samaritan village to make arrangements for Jesus. But the people there didn't want him to come to their village; they would not welcome him. And James and John were so offended that they ask Jesus if they could be authorized to "command fire to come down from heaven and consume them."

Whenever the story is read out loud, I half-expect someone to giggle. WHAT?!! They'd been with Jesus from the beginning and somehow thought that he'd like for them to respond to an insult with violence?

It would be laughable were it not for the fact that it's a depressingly typical reaction. I sometimes delight in having a bit of fun at the disciples' expense. They so often come off as obtuse, failing to understand what Jesus makes so painfully clear. And I suppose this could be what's going on here. But I rather think this moment illustrates a very human inclination. We tend to take offense and are inclined to reciprocate in kind. We give as good as we get.

But Jesus would have those whom he sends be more than merely typical. Don't worry about how others will respond. Just go forth to declare peace wherever you go. It's a peace not as the world gives. It has to be an inside job. It's a confidence in God's abiding presence in oneself ... and a trust that God abides within every other too. Offer that word of peace indiscriminately.

Jesus tells them to offer peace first. And he tells them to declare before they're through that "the kingdom of God has come near." And Jesus says that this word about the kingdom – like the word of peace – is to be proclaimed both to those who welcome it and to those who don't.

Again, as Marianne said last Sunday, the "kingdom of God is not a place." It's a way of seeing the world and life within it, one that runs counter to what is taken for granted as the way things are and evermore shall be. It's what our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, often refers to as "God's dream" for us and for our world ... as when he says that Jesus came to help us transform our world from the nightmare it has become into God's dream for it and for us.

The kingdom of God – "God's dream" for us and for our world – is more expansive than the world we occupy: this tired, vindictive, petty world; this world preoccupied with taking care of ourselves at the expense of everyone else and the whole of God's good creation. The kingdom of God – "God's dream" for us and for our world – is a kind of world where the first word out of our mouth when we greet a stranger is peace. It's the kind of world where the highest virtue is sitting down to share a meal with someone not of one's own circle of family and friends. It's the kind of world where we each know our self as a child of one God ... and we see that everyone we meet is a child of God as well.

Michael Curry's sense of the kingdom of God as God's dream for us and our world is why, in a statement this past week regarding the border crisis, he started with the reminder that we are all children of one God. And so it follows:

It is our sisters, our brothers, our siblings who are seeking protection and asylum, fleeing violence and danger to children, searching for a better life for themselves and their children.<sup>1</sup>

According to God's dream for us and for our world, we all are family.

When Jesus sends the seventy out ahead of him, he tells them to make sure to let everyone know that this kingdom of God has come near.

Some of those to whom they say this will experience it for themselves. They will have received a word of peace for themselves. They will have welcomed the bearers of such peace into their homes and offered them food, making companions of strangers. In so doing, the kingdom of God will have come near to them.

Some of those to whom the seventy are sent will not make room for the good news given them. And yet the messengers of God are to say that the kingdom of God has come near to them, as well. It's always within our grasp ... if only we will reach out for it, letting go of the world as we have known it and imaginatively living into the world as it might be.

There is still an urgency to all this some 2,000 years later. There are so relatively few in today's world who are grounded in Christian life and practice. And there are so many who only hear a distorted version of what I, for one, hold to be gospel truth.

We are still the answer to the prayer Jesus asks us to pray.

*... on your knees; ask the God of the Harvest to send harvest hands. On your way!*

On our way ... to imagine a new world and then to do our part to make it a new reality, as we live out the good news of God's love for all God's children, declaring peace wherever we go, peace for one and peace for all; making companions of the strangers at our borders; and holding out the hope of welcoming a world of possibilities not yet dreamt of.

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<sup>i</sup> Michael Curry @ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/episcopal-church-response-crisis-border>:

Over the past several weeks, The Episcopal Church has responded to the reports of inhumane conditions for children and other asylum seekers in government custody in a number of ways. This response includes calls for donations and goods from Episcopal dioceses on the border, prayers for those seeking safety, efforts to engage in advocacy, and pastoral messages from bishops around the Church.

"We are children of the one God who is the Creator of us all," said Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. "It is our sisters, our brothers, our siblings who are seeking protection and asylum, fleeing violence and danger to children, searching for a better life for themselves and their children. The crisis at the border is not simply a challenge of partisan politics but a test of our personal and public morality and human decency."

The Episcopal Church, through the Office of Government Relations (OGR) and Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), has compiled a list of resources, bishop statements, and information in response to the ongoing humanitarian situation at the southern border.

"Reports of poor care for children in Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody and continued policies to limit access to asylum are extremely concerning to people of faith. We must remember these children are here because they cannot find safety anywhere else," stated Rebecca Linder Blachly, Director of The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations. "The U.S. has an established system to process asylum seekers, who are coming to the U.S. legally. The response to asylum seekers who are desperate and afraid should not be deterrence or detention. We have the capability to respond in a humane and compassionate manner, and I am grateful for everyone in The Episcopal Church who is responding to this crisis."

The list of resources for education and support is available on the EMM website at <https://episcopalmigrationministries.org/response-to-the-border-educatio...> and will continue to be updated with ways to learn more and take action. The OGR and EMM webinar with Bishop Michael Hunn of the Diocese of Rio Grande will be made available on-demand through this website as well.

"The enormity of the challenge is daunting. It is easy to feel helpless to make a difference. While we cannot do everything, we can do something," said Curry. "The links to resources of bishops and dioceses on the border, the Office of Government Relations and Episcopal Migration Ministries offer practical suggestions for how we can each and together do something."

The Office of Government Relations represents the policy priorities of The Episcopal Church to the U.S. government in Washington, D.C. This office aims to shape and influence policy and legislation on critical issues, highlighting the voices and experiences of Episcopalians and Anglicans globally. All of its work is grounded in the resolutions of General Convention and Executive Council, the legislative and governing bodies of the church. Connecting Episcopalians to their faith by educating, equipping and engaging them to do the work of advocacy through the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN) is a key aspect of this work.

Episcopal Migration Ministries is a ministry of The Episcopal Church and is one of nine national agencies responsible for resettling refugees in the United States in partnership with the government. Episcopal Migration Ministries currently has 13 affiliate offices in 12 states. To directly support EMM and its life-changing work, visit [www.episcopalmigrationministries.org/give](http://www.episcopalmigrationministries.org/give) or text 'EMM' to 41444 (standard messaging and data may rates apply).