Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

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*“Left Behind”* Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Of the many good things we can say about Jesus, one of them is this: Jesus did *not* micromanage—and this morning’s story is a good example of it. Jesus taught. He led by example. He told great stories, and he sent people out to minister.

In fact, Jesus’ stories appear to have been so great that there are now many more disciples than the original twelve. Now there are so many that Jesus is able to pick-out a group of seventy of them to send out ahead of him.

He then gives them a bunch of directions—what they could and could not take with them, and prescriptions on how to behave. And then, two-by-two, they are sent out to the towns Jesus had intended to visit himself. He sends them out to minister the way he would have.

Now I do not for a moment believe that Jesus was *nervous* about the seventy being sent out in the field without his direct supervision. He knew what he was doing. He also knew them, and what they were capable of doing. He was confident of them.

However, I can imagine that he was concerned for them. He wanted them to do well, but he also wanted them to know what to do when faced with those who would *not* welcome them. We know this because one of his directions was on what to do if they were *not* well received.

Lest they think this might be the time and opportunity *“to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them,”* [9:54b] as James and John had wanted to do in the last chapter, Jesus described for them a much less violent way of dealing with rejection: *go out into its streets* [he told them] *and say, 11“Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.”* [10:10b,11]

*The kingdom of God has come near.* It has come near, indeed, it has come to your neighborhood, and *you* have chosen to stay behind.

So, here we have a story of Jesus, of himself intentionally staying behind, so that seventy disciples get some experience and learn what it was like to go out on their own to spread the good news. And we have Jesus also acknowledging that there are going to be whole towns who will choose to turn their backs on the gift they bring, they will *choose* to be left behind, to be left out.

So, there are two kinds of being “left behind” in this passage. The one is Jesus who *stayed* behind so that the seventy disciples could learn and minister on their own. And there are the people they will meet—the ones who will reject them and their ministry, the ones who choose to be left alone. However, there is at least one more type of people who are “left behind.”

Unfortunately, I cannot really describe this group to you, and I really would like to but I really do not have to because we actually know about this last group. They are us. We are the ones who often feel like the ones who have been left behind. We feel as though the world has moved on in ways that are strange and confusing, and we wonder where it is all going, and where it will all end up. We worry for the world—for our own loved ones, but also for the many people we do not know who make up “the world.”

I feel “left behind” a lot of the time. I think a lot of us do these days, and God knows this. That is why God’s holy words have been preserved for us.

It is these Bible stories that help us make sense of our lives when everything else seems off and odd. When we take the time to carefully see what God is doing among God’s beloved people, here in God’s word, in God’s world.

And so, when we look back at the story we may notice right away that the seventy did not go out alone. They went out *together*. That is: Jesus sent them out in pairs. It sort of sounds like Noah’s Ark where Noah was charged with bringing *in* two of every animal.

Certainly, the objective was the similar—the animals would multiply their number through procreation. The disciples would multiply their number through mutual support, cooperation, and assistance in engaging the people they would meet with God’s message of eternal life.

I think we are also supposed to see how important it is to collaborate with others. Instead of being “Lone Rangers,” we are supposed to be a part of a team. (And when you think about it: even the Lone Ranger was not alone. He had Tanto with him, helping him, and sharing his vision and desire for justice.) Although it is just like those times for the Indian not to be mentioned, isn’t it?

This was the way the disciples were supposed to enter each town: together, as a team. However, while they were there, they were not to depend only on themselves. They were to minister in such a way that the people they met were encouraged enough to invite them to stay in their homes—thus enlarging the circle of believers and making their new hosts new partners in ministry. Indeed, such hospitality was more than supportive. It was vital to the mission. The disciples would *need* such hospitality, such attention to their physical well-being in order to continue their work.

That was the way of things then, and in case you missed it, this is one of the chief features of they way our church has discerned our way forward. We are focused on finding ways in which our church can partner with other people in our community who are looking for the way to life and wholeness.

Our partnership with Family Promise is a great example. We did not decide to house these folks on our own. We chose, instead, to invite Family Promise to join us here on our campus. They had the contacts and all of the infrastructure. We have the facilities. Together we are doing work that would have taken so much more effort on our own.

Once upon a time, we did go it alone and we did wonderful and amazing ministry back then. We fed and housed so many. Some were kept safe from abusive spouses. Some were young people in need of a safe place to live while they were pursuing higher education.

What we should be proudest of about those ministries were the level of commitment it took to get those ministries started. Those are only two of the ministries for which this church will always be remembered, but what I would like us to recognize is the vision and sacrifice our ancestors in the faith made.

In a time and place where such assistance was *not* common, many of *your* relatives heard the story of Christ and allowed themselves to be sent out to minister, to make others safe. They built a ministry, which is to say: they allowed God’s vision to become their own.

When God envisioned a place where abused women could find shelter, despite the peril of putting ourselves between an angry husband and his wife, we made a sacrifice, we took the risk.

When God envisioned a place where young people from the neighbor islands could stay while they studied and worked to make a good future for themselves, we gathered the funds, we built the dormitory, and we welcomed and kept many young people safe and fed.

This was a risk. This was a sacrifice. But what our ancestors knew is what Jesus himself said to the disciples in this morning’s reading: *“that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”* [2]

The laborers were also few during our ancestors’ time, but they knew how to do what they did. They began with prayer. They humbled themselves and they followed Christ…and so do we.

*We* are the laborers God needs and wants, and yes, our numbers are even fewer than they were a few generations earlier. However, there is still God’s harvest to bring in and in our generation, our harvest are the many who are still in need of God’s good news for all of us: that no one need be left behind.

God is here with us. Emmanuel, Christ, the Spirit. The Holy Community is here with us, and we, of all people know this best because of the members of this church who believed this and lived it. They were *your* relatives, your neighbors, your friends. It is because of them we sit here today in this beautiful Sanctuary, on this amazing campus. *We* have this because of their faithfulness,…and yes, we have all of this because of our faithfulness, too.

The passage we heard said that the seventy returned with joy. Apparently, it had gone even better than they had hoped. They were even able to cast out demons in Jesus’ name.

Is that a tall order for us? Do you feel yourself wanting to hide under your pew?

Please do not be. Instead, take a closer look around at the ministry and mission there is to do today. There are many more people, many more organizations who share our values and are dream of peace, justice, and love. They may not always express it the way we do, but our goals are the same and we can do the work Jesus wants us to do with them.

The important thing to remember is that *this* is the path Christ has given us so that we may make our way through the confusion, fear, and challenges of our time: This mission of care and partnership, of working with others, of making friends and finding allies. Most of all: we will go out clothed in the Holy Spirit (whom we will *not* leave behind) looking for others, and looking out for each other, so that no one is left behind.

Praise God and may this be so. Amen.