

Reflection for Sunday, July 3, 2022

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Today's passage invites us to step out of the reactivity that the world around us reinforces. Jesus offers instead the consistent promise of peace and the nearness of God's kin-dom. The part of the scripture passage that really spoke to me this week is verses 5-11, a section bookended by clear commands from Jesus to his followers about how to respond, not react, as they engage the world they live in.

We live in such a reactionary world. You just have look at the internet – filled with reactionary comments.

How do we engage with our world in a faithful way without being reactionary?
Just what does it mean to take the good news to the world?

Let us set the stage...

So far in the gospel narrative Jesus has been the main actor. He has preached, taught, and performed miracles throughout the land. He authorized some of his followers to do the same, first authorizing the Twelve. (The travel narrative as Jesus moves from Galilee to Jerusalem for the last time.)

At this point in the narrative, Jesus commissions 70 followers (some translations say 72) to take his message to all those places he himself expects to go, authorizing them in very much the same way he had the Twelve earlier. This continual expansion of those drawn into Jesus' mission anticipates Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, and the transferal of responsibility for mission from Jesus to those who receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and beyond.

I love that aspect of the story, that the mission is not just for the chosen few, but for the many. And they go with a message that encompasses the whole world.

The story of Jesus' sending of the 70 gives a rare window into what it looked like to follow Jesus in the first generation. Jesus sends out disciples with the first proclamation that sounds deceptively simple: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'" (Verse 5). This word of peace is the first word, the opening word, the announcing word. Notice that Jesus does not tell them to do any sort of assessment before making this proclamation. He does not ask them to determine whether this house follows the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or

whether this house has kept the law or whether this house is likely to receive the good news Jesus brings. Jesus does not ask them to do a risk assessment or pre-judge whether this house will be worth their time.

I think this is hard for many of us. There is so much “us and them” language. It is so easy to “unfriend” people with different opinions than ourselves. When we walk along certain parts of Pandora Street (or avoid certain parts), when someone asks for change on the street, when we donate somewhere there is often this little voice in the back of our heads wondering what this money will be spent on, where it will go, if it would be better used elsewhere. We assess worthiness before sharing.

Jesus goes on to instruct his followers in the dynamic of sharing peace: “if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you” (verse 6). This verse is packed with instruction for reactive lives today and is worth taking time to unpack. First, Jesus assumes that these apostles he sends, do in fact have peace. Jesus says that “Your peace” specifically, not just random, generic peace, will rest on others or return to you.

As we engage others, we must first be well-grounded in God’s peace, the peace that passes understanding. God’s shalom is more than being calm. It is confidence in God’s abiding presence so that we also share that presence with others. (It is that confidence that allows us to “shake the dust off”, not to worry about what others think or say).

For me, this grounding comes from prayer. Often, they are very short prayers in nature, prayers of gratitude. Standing on the edge of the ocean, God’s creation becomes an amazing wonder. Sometimes when I am sad or angry, when I do not have the words, I simply light a candle – like we do every Sunday – that grounds me, reminds me that I am a beloved child of God, and that God’s presence is always near.

Engaging others means not treating them as objects upon which we act, but as sacred others with whom we are called to be fully and peacefully present. If they do not share this peace, Jesus does not advise reactivity or scorn. Instead, he reassures his followers that their peace is not diminished and cannot be taken away from them: “it will return to you” (verse 6).

At the end of this section, Jesus instructs them in a second proclamation: “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (verse 9). Remarkably, this proclamation applies whether one is welcomed (verse 8) or one is not welcomed (verse 10). The kingdom of God is promised to all, to those who receive as well as to those who reject.

I wonder how many times we have been near the kingdom of God and either not realized it or even rejected it.

The new kinship, a new way of understanding all human relationships, indeed, God's ordering of all things, is a life-changing proclamation. And it is for everyone!

Here again, Jesus does not instruct them to argue, convince, or threaten if they are not welcomed. He does advise them to signal their moving on by shaking dust off their shoes (verse 11). In this way, they are not weighed down by rejection, or paralyzed with trying to figure out what they did wrong or could have done differently to produce a different outcome. Instead, Jesus invites them to move forward in the confidence of these two proclamations, "Peace to this house!" and "The kingdom of God has come near."

When preparing for this morning, this part of the scripture seemed aimed directly at me. I take things personally, I live in my head a little, wondering why someone said something or acted in a certain way. It is hard for me to let go of things.

But here those being sent out are reminded that it is not about them, it is about the message. They cannot take it personally, and they should not waste time dwelling on it. You cannot control other people.

As Christians, we can reliably root our lives in these two proclamations — "Peace to this house!" and "The kingdom of God has come near." This is the good news that we have to share! These keep our gaze on God's activity right in front of us, rather than turning it to blaming, accusing or judgmental analyzing, symptoms that reactivity holds our lives in bondage.

There is a lot of vulnerability in this passage. The 70 are told to take nothing, to take whatever hospitality is offered. They are at the mercy of others. I wonder when you have ever been totally reliant on someone else. Most of us in this room are probably more used to giving hospitality than receiving it. There is something special and faithful about extending hospitality, but there is something extraordinary, something holy about receiving it.

Jesus does not sugar coat things, he knows that the 70 will encounter difficulties in their mission. Sends us out as "lambs in the midst of wolves." We are not expected to be wolves. We are not to be manipulative or coercive. We will not expect to get our way or assume our ways should dominate. In our gentleness and nonviolence, we will be vulnerable. We may not prevail. Wolves may still be wolves. But we will not follow their ways. We will bear witness, extend healing, and work for justice.

Imagine this is what you are sent into your daily life to do: to heal, to spread peace, to reveal God's grace. And to take yourself lightly.

I wonder how you share Jesus' message of love, and peace, and the nearness of God with those around you?

I wonder how you ground yourself in shalom, God's peace?

I wonder how you shake the dust off your feet.

I wonder how you receive the hospitality of others.

Sources:

www.workingpreacher.org

<https://www.spiritualityofconflict.com/>

Feasting on the Word commentary

I leave you with a blessing for the week...

Fruit

[Gal. 5.22-23]

Mysterious Love,
your Spirit is my breath;
the fruit of your Spirit is my life.

I breathe,
in and out,
and breathe in and out
your love, joy and peace.

My blood flows
through my body,
and through my body flows
your patience, kindness and generosity.

I look upon the world
and through my eyes shines
your faithfulness, generosity and self-control.

Your Spirit lives in me;
and the fruit of that Spirit is life;
and I give thanks.

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www.unfoldinglight.net