

“Jesus’ Evangelism Program”

(Pr 9) 4th Sunday after Pentecost - 7/7/19 - Luke 10:1-11, 16-20/C

Grace and peace to you from God, the Creator, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we look back on our celebrations of our nation’s Independence Day, it is easy to see how blessed we are. But as I was reflecting on our vacation, counting my blessings as it were, I kept thinking of how we at Advent have been so blessed, over the years, by our interns. Each of them unique and willing to share their gifts in various ways with this community. A few weeks ago, Vicar Emily introduced the archiving project that she has taken on over the summer to make sure that we remember those who first told us God’s story, and prepare our Advent story for our 40th anniversary year which is coming in 2021.

That is only one way that an intern leaves their mark. As I read today’s passage from Luke, I remembered Vicar Joel’s time among us. He was a gifted teacher, and I will never forget how he read a Bible phrase in a different way that changed today’s story for me, and gave me new eyes for doing evangelism in the 21st century.

Wait a minute. We just celebrated the 4th of July. You are *not* going to talk about Evangelism, are you? Well, yes I am. For centuries Christians have known the drill. We even sang about it in our opening hymn, “Lord You Give the Great Commission.” We can probably quote it by heart, “*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded.*” Matthew’s Great Commission has been the foundation for “Come and See” evangelism, which invites people to our church so they can be one of us. But those days of bringing folks into a religious institution are no longer working. Now we know we must “*Go therefore wherever they are...*”

It’s Summer. Traditionally a time for visitors, and that’s great. If you are worshipping with us today for the first or twentieth time, “Welcome!” But what if we continued to gather in, at the same time we also really learned to be sent, to go and do the work that Jesus gave us to do? How do we do that? First, we remember that hospitality in the ancient world was Job One. It was Rule One. It was the identifying mark, especially of the people of God. And Jesus’ entire ministry was all about going, traveling, moving on – from Bethlehem to Galilee; from the Jordan to Cana; from Jerusalem to Jericho to Samaria; to the places where only Gentiles lived across the sea. And Jesus and the Twelve went (per playwright Tennessee Williams) “**depending** on the kindness of strangers.”)

“*I am sending you out as lambs among wolves.*” Here’s where the wisdom of Vicar Joel comes in. I have always heard that as those poor defenseless little lambs, venturing out into the big bad world. Jesus must have been warning them to be careful, to watch their backs. But no! What Vicar Joel saw was the fact that lambs were **food**. So here’s the turnaround: Jesus was sending them out to be “*tasty morsels for a hungry world...*” (Mind blown. Interpretation changed forever.) Jesus’ idea of Evangelism was simple. Those he sends out should expect to be sacrificed to feed all of God’s world. Maybe not literally eaten, but certainly returning a little worse for wear. **Now** we can talk about how a handful of disciples could be sent to accomplish God’s work; how a handful of Christians might actually change the world!

Jesus had received the 12 he had sent out as his first Evangelism Team. Their report? It hadn’t gone well. They were discouraged, disappointed, disillusioned. And here’s another thing to love about Jesus – he didn’t just send out another team of 12, he sent out **70 more**. With very clear instructions:

1. Travel in pairs – don't go alone, don't speak to strangers (they might distract you from your work – or hurt you in the process.)

2. Carry no purse, bag, no sandals - don't pack light – because we all know that we pack for the for *just in case*. (Just in case we get asked to a dinner party, I'll throw in this nice dress. Just in case we have to walk a long distance, these comfortable shoes will be good. Just in case we end up in the woods we'll need bug spray and sunscreen.) No! Don't prepare for every situation. Trust God. Don't Pack!

3. Upon entering the provided lodging, speak a word of Peace! *You'll know* if you've entered the home of another person of peace. And don't move house to house looking for a King size bed or a Keurig coffee maker in your room! Receive the hospitality that is offered, not worrying about success in this home. The Kingdom of God has come near, either way.

All you need concentrate on is receiving a simple meal, sharing news from your travels – where you've been and what you've seen (that might make a connection with their travels, and what they've seen! This lodging provides a place to rest, until your trip and your work is completed. It's Summer. Many of us are traveling, recreating, visiting our days away. I've always found the best part of travel is making new friends, meeting interesting people, and even sometimes meeting not so interesting people! The JOY of those connections comes most often through **conversations**, and sometimes through sharing a simple meal, or cup of coffee, or an experience. It's amazing what folks are interested in. (I mean, I posted a few pictures on Facebook about my first time fly-fishing, and got almost 200 reactions! **Who knew** you were all fisher-people?)

Jesus told the 70 that once they were allowed IN to someone's home and life, they simply were to eat, talk and rest. And if they didn't **connect** (your peace resting on a person,) all that was required was for them (you) to move along. You don't have to **save** anyone. God already did that! So it seems Jesus' Evangelism program is just simply *connecting* - which our younger generations have known for years! *Euangelion* (your Greek for the week) just means sharing good news, connecting by bringing a blessing of peace and hopefully having someone respond, "Thanks, I needed that." The real joy of evangelism is when people connect at the surface, and then go deeper into a new relationship.

Today, you have entered a house, and peace has been spoken. You've come to God's House. Welcome! Eat! Connect with one another over coffee and conversation. You know how to do this. It really is easy. And, you can do it anywhere. When you're on vacation, bring peace to a home or lodging. When you enter a business, you can enjoy meeting the clerk or you can make a server's day just by your kindnesses. When you sit next to someone you don't know, *listen* to them before you start talking. And go in knowing, that some will not play along. Once you even hint at God or religion or faith, you will see them lose interest, or get scared. But some **will** pick up your "cues." Some will have been waiting for someone, anyone, to help them through their terrible, horrible, very bad day. Some may relax as you simply chat away the flight delay or the stadium line. Just say, *Peace to this house* - in your own words - and then wait to see what God will do.

How smart would we be to embrace Jesus' Evangelism Program? When you go and speak peace there is always that simple surprised moment when **you know** you could step in and connect for God... You just know. A co-worker shares that their mother has just died, or a classmate feels bad because friends have let them down, or a soccer mom next to you confides that her husband is an alcoholic. These are the moments when your "peace" is returned.

First, you hear their story; then you tell yours. Where it connects with God's story will be taken care of, because most people respond to God's heart in a real person who is right in front of

them. So don't rejoice just in the power of a successful encounter. Rejoice that you were chosen, rejoice that you have been blessed and rejoice that you are sent as an evangelist! Remember, God is near because YOU are near. And you, my friends, are *tasty morsels for a hungry world*. Amen.

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