
JOURNEYING TOGETHER

I have been waiting: for this time praying and singing together, sharing our concerns and joy with one another. It is my privilege to share the Word of God with you.

Today's text is from the Revised Common Lectionary. We will be following the Lectionary for most of our Sunday services and for our lives as people of God. I think it is important for us not to stay within my own interests or your own interests, but to open ourselves up to God. The texts we choose are not as important as *how we understand* the texts, to experience the living Word of God. I pray that, with the help of God's Spirit, we can find grace and truth while we share the stories in the Bible, which is never boring and never-ending.

Today's Bible reading starts with "after this." If this is 'after', what happened 'before'? Jesus met some people. They wanted to follow him, but they all had excuses not to go with Jesus. They had family, they had fears about the hard life, and they had other commitments. They wanted to follow, but they could not follow. They did not understand a new way of life in which, I think, both an *inward journey* and an *outward journey* were combined. Your physical self, the work you do for the church, is part of the travel, but your spirit is, as well. Without both of them, our faith journey is incomplete. We need both, the relationship with God which is about spirituality, and the relationship with the world, which is about justice. We can see, in the story of today, how these two ways – inward and outward – work together.

The Lord appointed seventy people and sent them in pairs to every town and place to share blessings and peace with people they meet, saying; "Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, and no sandals; and greet no one on the road."

The seventy people who are being commissioned by Jesus are not on the march, not an army, but, in Jesus' words are like lambs to the slaughter. *Wait a minute*. Is the task they were given really dangerous? Does sharing blessings and peace with others cost a lot of money or even your life? Well, it is easy to say 'peace be with you and blessing to you.', and then move on to the next town. But Jesus wasn't talking about hit-and-run faith - he was talking about building relationships with others, really helping them to connect with God through faithful witness. It is not easy to build a relationship with others. The seventy people are not supposed to be like door to door salespersons; they are supposed to be staying in the same house, to truly connect with the people who live there.

Jesus says in Luke 10:5, “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. *Remain* in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide. *Do not move* from house to house.”

Many people might say, “Well, that's not the right way to spread God's message. Staying with just one family, in just one place, is inefficient. You should move around and talk to as many people as possible!” But Jesus was making a point about *relationship*. Jesus actually sent the seventy out to establish a relationship with others, not just to greet and shake hands with as many people as possible. I think most of us know that building and maintaining a good relationship is not easy; it takes time, energy, care, patience and most of all, trust. That’s why Jesus points out that they are like lambs, not because there are many wolves out there, but because lambs know what it means to be in relationship. They know that their lives rely so much on their leader; they know that they are not perfect; they know that they are not alone; they know how to live with their leader, and with one another.

Notice that Jesus sent the seventy people *in pairs*. If the seventy people all went together to one place, all met the same people and all stayed in the same house, what would that be like? They would be more like wolves than lambs. They could depend on the power of their own group instead of the power beyond themselves. They could have strength in numbers. But, because they are sent in pairs, the followers have only one other person with them, one other believer. They are not allowed to carry any money; they cannot even buy a meal or a place to sleep. Every meal, every bed, every drink of water, depends on them reaching out to strangers, and all of their dependence relies on the One who sent them. It seems so insecure, so tenuous, yet these followers knew that a true sense of security only comes from a true relationship.

As I read this story over and over again, I was surprised by how much Jesus was looking after the seventy people. He did not say to them ‘how many people’ they should visit, or what they should seek to change. Instead, he simply told them: “go and make friends, and remember you are not in charge, but I am.” He reminded them that they are not alone.

Jesus says in Luke 10:16, “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

Do you see the circle of the relationships between God and Jesus, Jesus and his disciples, and between the disciples and the world? Do we see ourselves in the circle?

Our relationship with God establishes our relationship with one another, and it establishes our relationship with the world. Every relationship is important and deeply connected with each other. The question for us is *how can we deepen those relationships?*

Before coming to Ladysmith, I wanted to get some advice and wisdom from other ministers in the United Church, so I asked one of them, “please give me your advice how to survive in a first year as a new minister. You know, I want to spend my honeymoon period very well.” And he said, “honeymoon? You haven’t even *dated* the congregation yet. Min-Goo, ministry is all about relationship, relationship with God, relationship with one another, and relationship with yourself. The key to all those relationships is ‘trust’.” I think it was very good advice, and I took the advice very seriously.

Before I officially started my ministry here in Ladysmith, I felt that you and I were already closely connected; as if we knew each other even before we actually met. That’s how I felt in my interview with the search committee, and in every meeting that I had in the last month. And I’ve come to realize that it is not what we have done, but what God has done for you, for me, and for the world that makes us one. And it is not what we do, but how we are related with God, with one another and with the world that makes our community develop deeper faith and stronger relationships.

When the seventy people returned with joy, saying “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” Jesus said to them, “I watch Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, *do not rejoice at this*, that the spirits submit to you, but *rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*”

May our faith journey deepen both inwardly and outwardly through a deep intimacy with God and with one another. Thanks be to God.