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Go on Your Way – Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Let us pray: God our most holy Friend, grant us a transfiguring moment or two, that we may discern something of your beauty and worship your immeasurable love. Through this same Christ Jesus who makes all things new. Amen!

What would happen if I stood in the middle of Fellowship Hall and asked for 70 volunteers to go and preach the gospel in our neighborhood homes. I could see people running for the door. Leaving their coffee and cake behind.

Well the first problem I would have is that there are not 70 people attending worship service let alone going out to evangelize. So, I would have to settle for anyone who would be willing to go out ahead of me. But what would happen if Jesus asked?

If this story from Luke 10 tells us anything, it tells us that you do **not** want Jesus organizing volunteers at your church. Can you imagine? Everybody's milling around in coffee hour after the service, chatting and laughing and getting caught up with each other, and then Jesus steps into the middle of the room, clearing his throat and holding up a clipboard as he says loudly:

"Excuse me, can I have everyone's attention for a minute? I still need *seventy* volunteers for a service opportunity this week. This is a *great* chance to go out into strange and dangerous neighborhoods and invite yourselves into people's homes.

It will be like you are defenseless lambs sent out alone into the midst of ravenous wolves. Oh, and *please* remember not to bring *anything* that might make it easier or safer or more comfortable for you to do that, okay? So just come on over here and we'll get you all signed up. Thank you!"

I think if Jesus came and asked for volunteers, he would be very disappointed of how few would volunteer. How's does he expect anyone to come? He would have to try really hard to convince people to volunteer tell people it won't be hard, that anybody can do this;

tell them it won't take a lot of time or effort; tell them everything will be set up for them, all they have to do is show up...he would have to make it easy for them to commit, so his program can be a success. What is he thinking?

Of course, Jesus wasn't asking for volunteers. That's a pretty important thing to notice right from the beginning. Jesus *appoints* the seventy and *sends* them out.

He doesn't ask for volunteers, and he doesn't wait to see who comes forward on their own. He's the Lord, after all; he can do what your volunteer coordinator church only dreams of doing. But still: "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves"?

This is clearly dangerous territory, and he's sending them out completely unprepared and unable to fend for themselves? And wolves aside, without money, how can they buy food or get a place to stay?

Without a bag, what are they supposed to do about extra clothes if they get cold or wet or just dirty from the road? Doesn't he know they're going to need these things? The only thing they must rely on is the kindness of strangers. Hospitality is their only provision.

Behind Jesus' instructions to the disciples is a lesson for us all: hospitality is crucial to the advancement of forgiveness and healing, of justice and mercy, of righteousness and hope.

No hospitality, no gospel message. Well, if hospitality is so important, how do we practice it? Apparently, according to Jesus' instructions, "7Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.

8Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"

I must say that when Gwyn and I do home visits, Gail Schmeisser always has a table set with a cold bottle of water and homemade cookies. Bob Monteith always invites us to have lunch with him. That hospitality is greatly appreciated. Something that simple, a tiny act of kindness goes a long way and the kingdom of God is near.

A successful man known for his generosity was driving his new car through a poor part of town. A boy tried to flag him down. The man didn't want to get involved, so he pretended he didn't see the child. As he slowed for a red traffic light, he heard a loud crash. Someone had thrown a brick at his car, denting the trunk.

The man stopped, jumped out of his car and grabbed the boy that threw the brick. "you, juvenile delinquent!" he yelled. "You'll pay for this or got to jail!"

I'm sorry, mister," the boy cried. "my mom's lying on the floor in our apartment. I think she's dying. Our phone's been cut off and I've been trying for ten minutes to get someone to stop. I didn't know what else to do! Take me to jail, but please, call a doctor for my mom first."

The man was filled with shame. "I'm a doctor," he said and asked, "where is she?" The boy took him to his mother and the doctor administered CPR and called an ambulance.

"Will she live?" the boy sobbed. "Yes, son, she will," the doctor said. "Then it's worth going to jail. The boy said, I'm sorry I ruined your car. You can take me in now."

"You're not going anywhere," the doctor said. "It was my fault you had to throw a brick to get my attention." The doctor made sure the boy was taken care of, and as he drove home, he resolved not to fix the dent. He would keep it as a reminder that not everyone in need has a brick to throw.

That was divine intervention. Sometimes God must do something drastic in order to get our attention. And with Jesus the smallest of kindness can go a long way. We are to do this for everyone we meet, because the recipient could be an angel, prophet of Jesus in disguise. It can mean providing material support such as food, clothing or shelter. It can also mean accepting the truth of our guest's message.

This is immigration Sunday and I read a story about a man who went on a sabbatical with some students to a poor village in Mexico. A man came to speak to him about his experience with crossing the border and working in the United States.

The man who looked to be in his 30's told him that when his wife became pregnant, they had no money and no financial hope for starting their family. So, they made the decision for him to go to the U.S. to find work.

He was able to scrape up the \$500 it takes to pay someone to illegally lead him across the border. He paid his money, and then he walked through the desert with a group of men under cover of darkness, unable to see if there was a snake or scorpion in his path.

He walked through the blaze of unforgiving daylight and heat, wearing holes in his shoes and becoming exhausted from dehydration. One man in his 70's collapsed from the heat, so he carried him on his shoulders the rest of the way. When they crossed the border, they were immediately intercepted by the Border Patrol and taken back.

Penniless and humiliated, he started over. He earned that \$500, and he took the horrendous journey again, and this time he made it into the U.S. where he found work.

He worked ten-hour shifts with no breaks making less than minimum wage, he never stopped even when he cut his hand open washing dishes; his boss wouldn't let him stop.

And since he couldn't speak English, he couldn't express his needs, let alone defend himself under harsh treatment. After three years of saving up a little money under these conditions, he went back home, where he met his now three-year-old daughter for the first time. A tear rolled down his wife's cheek because she was so glad to see him.

A student in the group, moved by the man's testimony, asked, "How can we help?" What can we do to change this?" And he looked at the student and said, "Just be nicer. Don't treat us like we're drug dealers, rapists or female traffickers. We are not horrible people. Just be kind."

Like Paul says in Galatians, "You welcomed me as Christ Jesus." To welcome a disciple with even a cup of cold water is to receive Christ, and to receive Christ is to receive God.

Jesus says that extending kindness to any human being, welcoming any member especially those who are among our society's most vulnerable outcasts, is to welcome Jesus and thereby to welcome the Divine.

God does not dish out tidbits and give us a pat on the head for a job well done. Rather, the reward he offers is not payment for services rendered but, a free gift of God's grace in Jesus.

If we happen to be one of those who brought that message to someone and seen them respond in faith, then what other reward are we after but to go on your way to spread the good news. Amen.

Let us pray. Liberate us, O God, from all the burdens that we carry on this journey of faith, so that we might welcome your kingdom with open hearts and empty hands. Empower us, O Christ, to share the Good News that the kingdom has come near and to demonstrate its coming through communal acts of compassion, justice, and peace. Amen.