

The Anniversary of America's Independence
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
3 July 2022

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

I would like to start the sermon today by thanking all of you who have been praying for the success of our Youth Group's mission of service to New Mexico this last week, and to all of you who supported this mission financially, especially our Street of Shops. As I was thinking about our youth and their leaders this week, I remembered being on mission in Honduras over the fourth of July week in 2013. I had the joy to celebrate the 4th of July doing what makes America such a great nation, serving others in need. And I was not alone in this effort, there were dozens of American teams from dozens of American Christian denominations serving in various parts of Honduras that same week. Many of us tend to concentrate on what's wrong with our country, but that week I had the opportunity to see what is right about us. We are a nation filled with extremely generous people who year after year engage in mission to places like Honduras, Haiti, and various places in Africa. These short-term missionaries engage in mission not just because they see themselves bringing the Gospel to the nations. The truth is that the Gospel has been there for centuries before we arrived. We do it because we love God and want to be obedient to Christ's call to engage in servant ministry. We want to share our faith with others, but we also want to learn from their faith. We both tell and hear the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth.

These are the reasons why Jesus sends his disciples out today, when he "appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go." Many of you remember that in Chapter 9 of Luke, Jesus sent out his Apostles, now he is sending out some of his disciples. The word disciple means "One who learns or learner" and the word apostle means "One who is sent out, or a sent-out one." There are times when we are called by God to be disciples and to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from him. Sometimes this learning comes to us at the feet of teachers, pastors, and friends. This is what we call discipleship. God feeds us from his word and sacrament and instructs us through teachers and pastors, so that we may understand his word and so that we may grow in our faith. This is the reason why churches have Bible studies, why the sermon is so important during the service, and why book studies and prayer groups are so needed in our churches today.

There are times, however, when God calls us to be sent-out ones. He sends us into the world because, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." There is a ripe harvest of brothers and sisters in our own communities who are hungry and thirsty for the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. There is so much hopelessness around us. There is so much helplessness. There are so many people who feel overwhelmed by life's circumstances. There are so many in need of a word of encouragement and a small sign of love. Jesus

today uses the image of harvest time to give us the sense of urgency in our mission. I grew up in Colombia, and when the coffee harvest was ready for picking, everything stopped and everybody, from the youngest child to the oldest member of the household became involved. If any time was lost or if there weren't enough workers the harvest would be spoiled. In our own context, I have spoken to farmers in Iowa who tell me that when the corn harvest is ready they often run their farm equipment 24-hours a day until the entire harvest is collected. A harvest can be lost rather easily if there are not enough hands to do the job. This is the reason why Jesus sends his learners into the mission field as sent-out ones. We may say that mission is the very reason for discipleship. God prepares us through word and sacrament so that we may engage in harvest gathering in our own communities and around the world. We cannot remain learners forever, there are times when we must engage in the actual work of the Kingdom of God.

This reminds me of a short story I read somewhere, "A preacher in the Midwest tells of a woman who called him to speak of her dissatisfaction with the programs of the Church. He invited her to come to his office and talk the problem over with him. She accepted the invitation and brought to his attention some of the things that were needed and could be done. He gratefully acknowledged the wisdom of her ideas. He then said, "This is wonderful that you are so concerned and interested in this. You are the very person this Church needs to head up this program. Will you take the job?" Her reply was just as immediate. "Oh, no, I don't want to get involved. With my club-work and the hours that I put on some other things, I just don't have the time. But I will be glad to advise you any time." The preacher's answer was classic and well put: "Good, gracious, lady, that's the problem now. I already have 400 advisers. I need someone who will work." (<http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/luke10x1.htm>). In the words of James, we must be not just hearers of the word, but also "doers" of the word. This is the reason why Jesus sends us out, "like lambs into the midst of wolves." The mission field is often a dangerous place to be. Dangerous because we often enter the lives of people who are in crisis and this is always risky. Our very presence challenges the corrupt powers of the world. We come to befriend and to love the very people these corrupt powers forget, abuse, and betray on a daily basis. We come to say with our presence that these brothers and sisters are important, that they are God's children, and that they are the Church. Most importantly, we come to preach a message of love and peace.

Jesus tells his disciples that the first thing they must say when entering a house is, "Peace to this house!" We don't go into mission to preach a message of judgement and condemnation, but rather a message of peace and love. Peace of mind and heart has become our greatest need in this country. Many of us are afraid at the state of affairs of our country. Many of us are terrified that we might one day lose the freedoms for which so many have worked so hard for so long. Depression is on the rise, anxiety is on the rise, optimism is in decline, and many feel lost, angry, and disenfranchised. God is sending us today to announce his peace. "The kingdom of God has come near." We are not alone and isolated. We are not forgotten. God is in our midst. His Kingdom is among us. This Kingdom is a new relationship between God and humanity, a relationship based on love

and not on condemnation. This is the Kingdom of God which through his Son is saving the world from hopelessness and helplessness. This Kingdom is Jesus himself, the precious pearl and great treasure that makes life worth living, even though our situation has become so very precarious.

My friends, there is a danger in believing that the mission field is limited to Haiti or Honduras. In fact, the mission field is anywhere God is not recognized as God. The mission field is the life of any person who feels isolated from God, who has not accepted Christ as Messiah, or who has abandoned the faith because the darkness of the world has taken over his heart. The mission field is anywhere there is hopelessness and lack of purpose. The mission field is anywhere arrogance and self-sufficiency has convinced the human heart that we have no need of God. The mission field is anywhere our technology-saturated society fills our need for God with toys and entertainment. The mission field is our own homes, communities, and networks. The mission field is both inside these doors and outside them. It is everywhere and it is ripe.

I pray that today is the day you allow the Lord to call you into the mission field of your own life. Remember that the message you bring into that field is a message of peace and hope and not a message of judgment and condemnation. We live in a world where hope is in short supply and it is our job to get out of the comfort zone of our own lives and to boldly proclaim that God's kingdom is among us. I pray that you will be filled with joy as you engage in this mission. This great joy comes from knowing that God loves us in amazing ways and that through Christ we are accepted and forgiven! So, be at peace, God knows our suffering, God knows our fears, God is sending us into our world as ambassadors of his peace and love. God is among us and with him on our side all things are possible. Now, let us pray for our beloved nation:

A Prayer For Sound Government (BCP, page 821)

Let us Pray,

O Lord our Governor, bless the leaders of our land, that we may be a people at peace among ourselves and a blessing to other nations of the earth. To the President and members of the Cabinet, Governors of States, Mayors of Cities, and to all in administrative authority, grant wisdom and grace in the exercise of their duties. To Senators and Representatives, and those who make our laws in States, Cities, and Towns, give courage, wisdom, and foresight to provide for the needs of all our people, and to fulfill our obligations in the community of nations. To the Judges and officers of our Courts give understanding and integrity, that human rights may be safeguarded and justice served. And finally, teach our people to rely on your strength and to accept their responsibilities to their fellow citizens, that they may elect trustworthy leaders and make wise decisions for the well-being of our society; that we may serve you faithfully in our generation and honor your holy Name. For yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Amen.