

Pentecost 4C – July 3, 2022 – Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Several years ago, I officiated at the funeral of the wife of a high school classmate. Actually, this fellow and I went through high school and junior high school together. I think this man did well in life and I told him so. “Charlie, you did well,” I said. “You got your doctorate and now you’re a college professor teaching chemistry. He looked at me and said, “I could have made more money in industry, but I like to think there are hundreds of chemists out in the world doing research that I had a part in educating and motivating.” He was satisfied with his life’s work. He had made his mark on the world, so to speak. That is one of the things we celebrate in July; winning the freedom to determine our own future, to make our marks on the world.

There is more than one way to make your mark on the world. A man was discussing with his pastor his experiences in World War II. He had been in the army and took part in the invasion of Normandy on D Day. He talked about the suffering, the deprivation, the horror of war. But then he said, “still, I look back on those four years as the very best years of my life. For once in my life, I really had the feeling that I was part of something, part of something bigger than myself. I was on the move. We had a mission.” This mission, which he did not explain, was of course to change the world.

I think that is what is going on in today’s text. Jesus gets his ministry rolling by calling 70 people and empowering them to be his disciples. When it comes to discipleship, this is a story that we should examine closely. The Gospel of Luke moves quickly from Christmas to Jesus’ calling 12 disciples. All he did most of the time was say “follow me,” and before you know it 12 men had become his full-time assistants. Ordinary men; a small group; not that difficult to manage for an important task. But 70 men, over six times as many, that’s another story; that’s a challenge.

I read somewhere a while ago that the average pre-pandemic Sunday morning attendance for an American Protestant church was about 60 people. These are not all rich, intelligent, good looking and well-motivated people. They are a cross-section of society—a mixture. We may be bigger than that, but our constituency is the same. That’s how it was with the first 12. When you read about them, you almost think that Jesus made some mistakes when he called those people to be his first followers. They never seemed to understand what he was trying to teach them. They bickered among themselves and of course, all but one denied him and ran away at the end. So, it’s rather surprising to see Jesus in this text enlarging that number of assistants and calling as many as 70 to work with him. But that’s what Jesus does.

The first 12 have demonstrated by their behavior and lack of vision that they are not going to be all that much help to Jesus in spreading the word. “Shall we call down fire on that village?” they asked when they were not well-received there. That’s the mentality he was dealing with. Not much different from the Roman attitude so far as I can tell. It is always disappointing to see people who have been raised in church and instructed in the faith malfunction. So, you know Jesus had to be disappointed by his disciples’ attitudes and behavior. But that didn’t stop him. Here he launches out again and calls an even larger crowd of assistants. You and I here in this church this morning, we are part of Jesus’ propensity to keep reaching out and naming others to share in his work.

Well, what exactly is this work that he called the 12, the 70, and each of us to do? He sends us all out to do the very same things in the world that he is doing. No political connections are required, no union

membership, no pedigrees, no minimum height, or weight. All that is required is commitment. And here is what we are to do.

First—we are to do miraculous, divine acts. We to demonstrate that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. And we do that by curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, and casting out demons. How we do that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is obviously going to be different from how they did it in the first century. Instead of saying, “pick up your mat and go home,” we may build a hospital. Instead of raising somebody from the dead, we may feed that person to keep her from dying, help rebuild after a hurricane or flood, offer counseling to prevent the suicide, struggle for justice so that demons are uncomfortable where we live. But it all makes the same point—now the world is under new management. There has been a major shift in the leadership up at the front office and its high time that the world knows it and gets used to it. The mighty are being put down from their thrones and the lowly are being lifted up just as the Magnificat says. The 70 are to do the same things Jesus does—nothing too big, just your average raising-of-the-dead sort of thing. That’s just my sarcastic way of saying the 70 and we too are empowered to do big things, great things. I don’t want to denigrate the small things. We must maintain our facilities. We must pay our bills. We must support one another. But in this text, Jesus is calling the 70 and us not simply to maintain the status quo but to raise the dead—that is, change the world with revolution if necessary, so that all may live. Enhancing life is the all-encompassing Christian mission.

Now if that first point shocks you, wait ‘til you hear point two: we are to do all that without payment. Take no money with you, no purse, no bag, no sandals. Go out with just what you have on! The 70 are to go forth just as Israel went forth in the Exodus, with no provisions, nothing to fall back on other than the miraculous manna from heaven. They are to go out relying only on God and on the compassion and the goodness of others to make their way in the world. Jesus calls them to a huge task and doesn’t give them any financial backing whatsoever. They are completely dependent on God, and they know it.

When you think about it, all of them were beggars. Begging involves asking people for food or money in order to survive. How do you think Jesus survived after he began his ministry? There is no record of his taking time off to go back and make some money in the carpentry shop. He is constantly on the move, preaching, teaching, and healing. There was no time to make money. How did he and his disciples meet the basic needs of life? They had to beg. He had called the 12 away from their occupations. None of them had revenue-producing jobs.

That’s a startling thought when it hits you because it is just the opposite of the way we try to live in our self-sufficient, self-reliant society. Is there something about begging that Jesus sees and we do not? Maybe! Begging makes you dependent upon the generosity and goodness of others. It forces the people to respond to you, to feel some responsibility for you, or else turn away. Begging builds a small community between the one in need and the one who responds to that need. Could it be that Jesus chooses this lifestyle for his ministry because it forces us to see the interconnectedness of life? Is this just one more way that Jesus teaches us that there are no gated communities in the Kingdom? I don’t know. But I’ll tell you this: I would rather follow a spiritual leader who needs financial support than one who makes a half a million a year. One more observation comes to mind. St. John’s sponsored two Sudanese refugees much the way St. Andrews sponsored Long Lee years ago. These two young men had nothing and were totally dependent on church support when they got here. But when my mother was knocked down by the automatic door closing on her at the geriatric center and she was taken to the

Phoenixville ER to be checked out, it was one of those Sudanese fellows that helped to take care of her once she got there. Interconnectedness facilitated by financial dependence.

The third point is the most intimidating of all. Jesus warns the 70 that they will encounter rejection and resistance. They are not called to withdraw inside some safe fortress. At other places he says that his followers will be dragged before governors and kings. They are being sent into a tough world. Those who profit from the old world, from conventional arrangements and the present power structure will not receive them well. The 70 are sent on a perilous adventuresome mission.

So, the question is—will you go? Will you take the risk, step out, move out with the 70 and go where Jesus is about to go? Where is he going? I'm not sure. It could be as far away as Mississippi or as near as Powell Street in Norristown. There's risk, yes, but also joy, the joy of doing what God wants done. Jesus is looking for 70 good people to take what he has into the world, to do the very same ministry that he does. Will you go?