

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, 2016
All Saints Episcopal Church, San Leandro
The Rev. Justin R. Cannon
Interdependence Day

At the end of every service Deacon Pam offers the Dismissal. Sometimes she proclaims, “Let us go forth in the name of Christ” and other times “Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.” In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus offers his own version of a dismissal when he sends his disciples out. We are sent out to do what we have heard, to be who we have proclaimed ourselves to be. Jesus’ dismissal to the disciples was: “Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.” What do you think? Should Deacon Pam use that at the end of today’s liturgy?

One commentator sheds some light on this sending out by Jesus. He explains, “In the ancient world, any person who departed from the family village entered a foreign and hostile world. Death was always and everywhere a threat. Such a traveler had to rely on the kindness of a village elder to extend hospitality and temporary protection from those who intended to harm or kill this stranger, Jesus, therefore, utters a cultural truism when he says to the seventy: ‘I am sending you as lambs into the midst of wolves’—strangers among nonrelatives.”

I’m sure some of us must feel this way sometimes—lambs in the midst of wolves. We wander a culture that sometimes feels like a strange and foreign land that is becoming more and more litigious each day, where big business is looming with fine print waiting for us to sign the dotted line, digital empires tracking our every move blasting us with advertisements hoping for a cut of a paycheck that is getting us by, drivers who seem more and more aggressive and careless each year, rampant individualism manifest in so many forms it becomes suffocating.

Before you start thinking I am in some pessimistic mood, I will take a moment to remember that things aren’t all doom and gloom—amidst oppression of LGBT people, there is emerging justice; amidst oppression of the earth and creatures of the land, there are pockets of hope and decisions made to protect mother earth; amidst strife and violence we are seeing more and more people coming together as close-knit communities working for change. But the journey is not always easy. I can attest to that and I’m pretty sure your own life stories testify to this truth.

Jesus offers a solution for this. Our Gospel lesson says, “After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.” Did you hear the key phrase in that? He sent them out in pairs. Two-by-two. They weren’t expected to walk this walk alone. There is a fanatic individualism that has been crowned victorious in our culture. One writer comments, “The notion of ‘pulling yourself up by your bootstraps’ has become a notion so fundamental to the mainstream American ethos that it’s highly unlikely that any sincere candidate running for public office could actually challenge the idea directly without committing an act of political suicide. The expression is meant to imply something like ‘improving oneself by one’s own efforts’ and speaks to the rather hyper-independent and gritty identity captured in the fantasy of the American West or the idealized middle class of White suburbia in the 1950s.”

Jesus sent these seventy out in a state of utter dependence. He commanded them, “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.” He then makes it clear to them that they will rely on others around them, echoing the notion of two-by-two, that we are in this together.

So, what’s the good news in this story? I believe it is in the truth that we are not expected to walk this journey alone, and that our Lord commissioned us to a journey of interdependency. This brings me back to Saint Paul’s letter to the Galatians we heard earlier. He writes:

“Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”

We are wrapped in one common destiny of interdependency, “So then,” as Saint Paul writes, “whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.” The Corazon house build last weekend is one such example of faith in action—in this very manner of spirit—working for the good of all as a manifestation of our faith. All Saints, together with four other congregation in our deanery raised a total of \$8400 to build a home for a family in need in Tijuana.

[“Later in the day on Saturday, I had the opportunity to spend some time inside the house once the walls were up, the windows and door in and the roof up with Roberto who we were building the house for. We worked for a while finishing up the ladder for the loft as well as the railing that will keep those sleeping from falling out. Although we did not speak the same language and could not really talk we were able to spend time together and work together for a common goal. There were a lot of people there during the day and it was nice to get some quiet time 1:1 time with him and to work together!” – Brad]

[“As our tour bus pulled into the neighborhood, I was struck by the level of abject poverty. In the US, I am the 99%. In this town, I was most decidedly in the 1%. The homes were largely built from what we could consider scrap materials. Some were lucky enough to have windows but most homes had tattered drapes blowing in the warm breeze. We walked down to our build site and were greeted by smiling faces and a sign that said "Welcome Americans." For the first 4 hours, we all worked in harmony to get the walls up. When lunch rolled around, we were all very hungry. The host family and their neighbors came down the dusty hills with large pots of food. Rice and beans, chicken, tortillas and cactus salad. They even provided us with cold drinks. None of the friends would eat until they were sure that the workers had had their fill. Their generosity and gladness of heart filled not only my belly but my soul. They had so little and gave so willingly. May we all aspire to such heights.” – Mary]

In this opportunity to serve and meet a human need, we found that in the beauty of relationship we too were changed. And that is the good news of this Gospel and part of why Jesus sent the seventy out two by two. In companionship we learn from one another and grow. We serve and are served, and in that exchange we find God. Jesus intentionally sent these disciples out in a

vulnerable state of dependency—which inherently points to this need for the other. This notion of the good news in today's Gospel being that we aren't expected to walk the journey alone, but in companionship with each other—in a profound interdependence—reminds me of a parable I once read, which I will leave you with today:

A man spoke with the Lord about heaven and hell. The Lord said to the man, "Come, I will show you hell." They entered a room where a group of people sat around a huge pot of stew. Everyone was famished, desperate and starving. Each held a spoon that reached the pot, but each spoon had a handle so much longer than their arms that it could not be used to get the stew into their own mouths. The suffering was terrible.

"Come, now I will show you heaven," the Lord said after a while. They entered another room, identical to the first - the pot of stew, the group of people, the same long-handled spoons. But there everyone was happy and well nourished.

"I don't understand," said the man. "Why are they happy here when they were miserable in the other room and everything was the same?"

The Lord smiled, "Ah, it is simple," he said. "Here they have learned to feed each other."

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