

2 Kings 5:1-14

Psalm 30

Galatians 6:(1-6)7-16

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

This is the weekend that we celebrate the nation's birthday. We pause for a few days to contemplate the fact that an intelligent and passionate group of men and women recognized their relationship with God and the rights God had given them and set about to be sure that they could exercise those rights. The result was the birth of a new nation. Thirteen colonies...all unique and with different priorities...became the United States of America. This country remains the greatest experiment in governance ever undertaken by human beings in all of history. It's a moment worth pausing for. Most of you know that the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor on what they knew to be the right thing to do. There had to be a war to get out from under the oppression they felt was keeping them from exercising their rights and they paid a high price for that war. Nine signers died of wounds suffered during the Revolutionary War; five were captured or imprisoned; wives and children were killed, jailed, mistreated or left penniless. Twelve signers' houses burned to the ground. Seventeen lost everything they owned. Not one of them defected. Their honor like their new nation remained intact. They were single-minded. They did not count the cost. They knew they would pay dearly for insisting on claiming their God-given rights, but they were on a mission. And as a nation we continue to this day to try to live out the meaning of our creed and to pursue the objective of that mission.

Sometimes when we are listening to scripture it seems hard to figure out how Jesus' words or the words of the prophets might apply to us. But this morning, we hear Jesus describe a kind of mission to seventy of his followers. He's not sending them to war...exactly. He's sending them out to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. He is deploying them to go out into the world and continue his mission...the one he described to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth when he read a passage from the book of Isaiah. The passage described the mission of the

Messiah: to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives; recovery of sight to the blind; to let the oppressed go free. And Jesus told them all that this passage had been fulfilled within their hearing. This was Jesus' mission throughout his ministry and now he is deploying the seventy to go out into the harvest and expand his mission and the number of people who share in it with him. We are among those people who share in the scope of Jesus' mission. We are baptized Christians. We are members of a church which is the body of Christ in the world. Jesus' sent a small army of folks out into the world, but he didn't do it the way a conventional army would do it. His army of Christian soldiers was not setting out to conquer others or to gain territory. It was set out to fight evil and hurt and misunderstanding and alienation. It was sent out to expand the scope of Jesus' mission but its objectives were the same: to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives; recovery of sight to the blind; to let the oppressed go free. And when Jesus deployed them, he didn't send them out the way a conventional army would be sent out. He sent them out with some very specific instructions that were the complete opposite of how we typically think about armies being deployed. There were no weapons and there was no desire to conquer. Their mission was to proclaim the good news and to prepare people for an encounter with Jesus.

These are Jesus' specific instructions: He told his army of seventy to go out in pairs...not alone...and not in a crowd. There were a lot of people who needed to hear what these followers of Jesus would tell them. The harvest is plentiful, Jesus said, but the laborers are few. The word 'harvest' implies that the people were mature and were ready to hear the good news. Not all of them were ready, but some of them were. So Jesus sent the seventy out with no purse, no bag, and no sandals. And Jesus told them not to talk to anybody on the road. Jesus knew that it was a dangerous world. He told them right up front, "I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves."

This was a little army that was unarmed and vulnerable. It had no food, no housing, no change of clothes, and no money. These pairs of apostles were completely dependent on the hospitality of others. Jesus intentionally put them in a vulnerable position. We humans tend to be less frightened or suspicious of people who are dependent upon us. And we can't hear what someone is saying if our guard is up. So Jesus made sure the guard was down.

Jesus told them what to do when they reached a town. Offer peace to the house that takes you in and don't move around from house to house. This isn't about networking. This is about sharing the good

news of Jesus. And Jesus told them to eat whatever was put in front of them. The chances are, they might have to make a decision between obeying their dietary laws or graciously accepting someone else's offering. Apparently, Jesus was telling them that the dietary laws were going to have to be suspended in favor of the gospel and their mission. Many of you know that when someone rejects the food we offer it sometimes feels like they are rejecting us.

Jesus also told them what to do when they were rejected...as Jesus knew they surely would be. Shake off the dust of the town that rejects you and move on. Don't stand there arguing with them, but tell them before you leave that the kingdom of God has come near. Jesus said to them: "Proclaim the good news!" He did *not* say to them, "You are responsible for being sure they accept it." This is a battle certainly; but it's not a battle of conquest. They didn't need to worry about being sure that everyone they spoke with bought into what they were saying. They were responsible for carrying out Jesus' mission. They were not responsible for the results. Even though they were so very happy about their success when they returned to Jesus, he told them not to rejoice that the demonic spirits had submitted to them, but be happy about the fact that they had done as they had been asked. The results were not what was most important. We often don't see the results or even know of the results of the work we do on behalf of Jesus. What don't know what impact our kind words might have on someone else or how a change in our own heart may touch someone else's. What was important was that they had spread the word as they had been asked to do. And that's what's important for us as well. They had a relationship with Jesus and as such a relationship with God and Jesus told them they should rejoice that their names were written in heaven. And we should, too.

The mission of the seventy...to proclaim the good news and prepare people for an encounter with Jesus...is the same mission we have! It's the same mission that all baptized Christians have. Several years ago our Vestry undertook the arduous task of updating our mission statement. A lot of people think that writing a mission statement for a church must be pretty easy. It isn't!! The Vestry spent most of the Vestry Retreat working on it and then had to schedule a second meeting to complete it. They needed to decide on just the right words that said what they wanted to say. Take a look inside your bulletin today. Our Mission Statement is on page 6. It's short and sweet and says exactly what the Vestry wanted it to say. And if you read it closely, you can see that it's modelled after Jesus' original mission and his commission to the seventy when he deployed them. We are part of an army of believers. We are Christian soldiers who have our marching orders to go out into the world and heal the hurting, comfort

the desolate, forgive the insolent, and fight hate with love so that those ready to encounter Jesus might come to know him as the salvation of the entire world.

People can't hear us when we're armed or when we're powerful. People can hear us when we are vulnerable and able to listen as well as speak. Going out into the world of wolves when we know we are lambs is a scary thing to do, but we do not go alone. Jesus goes with us and Jesus has armed us with the most powerful weapon of all...and that is love. It is the only thing that has ever stilled the raging heart or conquered hate. And for that, we can all say,

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.