

“Outward Incarnational Focus”

Luke 10:1–12

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March 15, 2020

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. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain 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. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

What a weird and strange time to be the church. It is so strange to look out at an empty sanctuary. But today I am reminded that a church is not a building. A church is not a set of ideas or doctrine. A church is not a place to hide from the world. The Church is a lived reality.

Coronavirus is filling the news, everyday it's a new number of cases, or a new discovery of how it's transmitted, or a new story about the sad state of quarantine. It is overwhelming and all consuming. And so often all this news leads us to fear. Fear of not having enough toilet paper. Fear of the constant and unending news. Fear of getting sick. Fear of someone who looks Asian.

Then our scripture and our vital mark today talk about being sent out. Jesus “appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.” Jesus sent them out. So when we talk about an outward incarnational focus, we know that it is not about creating a building, but that we are to go out to the people sharing good news and healing and eating meals together. But the question today must be then, “How do we go out into this world when we are supposed to stay home and practice social distancing?”

It starts with sharing peace. Jesus says when you enter a house “first say, ‘Peace to this house!’” The first thing you are to do as we go out, is to offer peace. This is more than putting a peace sign in our window, this is Shalom. The Hebrew word for peace that encompasses us: mind, body, and soul. A wholeness that trusts in God but also acts in the best interest of their neighbors. We offer this peace because God first offered us peace.

The vital mark of a congregation that we are focusing on today centers on the word incarnational. Incarnational is a churchy word that speaks to the belief that God came to earth and put on flesh, becoming one of us, moving into the neighborhood. So in order for us to be incarnational, we must make the peace of God real in our world. This currently means taking science seriously so that we can mitigate this crisis. It means practicing social distancing so that we do not infect our neighbors, especially those most at risk. This does not mean that we hole up and avoid the world because the world still needs peace, in fact it needs it more than ever right now.

I've seen a post floating around social media that talks about this theme. It says "Conversations will not be cancelled, relationships will not be cancelled, love will not be cancelled, songs will not be cancelled, reading will not be cancelled, self care will not be cancelled, hope will not be cancelled." This facebook post speaks to the fact that we as the body of Christ can continue to live and share peace. We can continue to embody that peace to a world filled with fear.

In order to pull this off though, it will require us to be creative. We can continue to offer peace in the same way we have been doing. And this has been a beautiful silver lining in the midst of all the chaos and fear in the world. I have seen stories popping up everyday that counteract the fear and instead offer peace.

In Italy, they are in full lock down but instead of giving into fear they are opening their windows and singing and playing music. Lizzo, a famous singer/songwriter, streamed live on Instagram. She played her flute and offered words of healing and wholeness to all who wanted to stop by and listen. I have heard of a couple of churches that are purchasing groceries online to be delivered to shut-ins and people who are hungry instead of putting them at risk by sending them to the store. Our session has started spontaneously sharing stories of ways they have seen God at work over email this past week. There has been a beautiful outpouring of peace that passes all understanding in the midst of this chaotic world.

So this week, I challenge you to find a way to share God's peace. Give someone a call this week to keep them from isolation. Have your kids write letters of peace to folks in nursing homes who have been forced into quarantine. Support your local businesses who are going to be hard hit in the coming weeks. Reach out to your friends of Asian descent who might be facing extra hardships as the realities of racism continue to plague our world. Donate food to a food bank as people will struggle to find food as some services may shut down.

This disease is not a chance for us to hide from the world. No, it deepens our call to be incarnational, to be sharing hope, to make God's peace a reality in our world. It will require us to use our brains and our creativity to find new ways of

sharing God's peace. So my friends, how are you going to share God's peace this week? This week we will be engaging in some different practices through email, Facebook, and the phone. I invite you to join us as we come up with new ways of being there for one another. And I invite you to share with us on Facebook as we talk about different ways of engaging our neighbors. Ways of engaging that do not put people at risk but that share God's peace in the midst of chaos. And in this way we will continue to live into an outward incarnational focus. Amen.