

Peace Be Upon This House

July 6, 2025 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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Texts: Luke 10: 1-11

On Sundays' when we celebrate communion, as we will do today, we don't have regular prayers, but I think it might be helpful to get some stuff out as I begin today, so let me ask, what's on your hearts and minds today? What's in your prayers? ...

(flooding, budget bill, our prayer list, complexity of the fourth of July, all the wars...)

I'm not surprised this didn't come first, but what about thanksgivings today? Joys?

I'd add the joy that this is Sunday, and we are together in the name of Jesus, who is the source of life and love and hope and peace, and we are celebrating communion today, so we get to taste that life and love and hope and peace, and have it touch every cell in our bodies and every part of our lives.

That's a lot. So much heartache and love and more. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I imagine that the people who first followed Jesus and listened to his teaching were also not unfamiliar with such a swirl of concerns. They lived in difficult days to be sure. They lived with climate related disasters that killed neighbors near and far, they lived under an empire whose budget benefitted the wealthy at the expense of others, they lived with public celebrations that glorified power rather than the common good, they lost loved ones to cancer (without knowing that name), they worried about their children and grandchildren and what the future would hold for them. They sat with us on the mourners bench in so many ways.

It is no great surprise then that the basic message of Jesus drew a crowd. It was after all, good news. The kingdom of God has drawn near to you. All of this that you are suffering through will not just come to an end – it will be reshaped, reformed, renewed into the kind of life, the kind of world, that God intended for all. That transformation, the reign of God taking the place of the reign of Caesar and sorrow and struggle, it's drawn near to you.

I'm not sure they would have needed too much detail in order to respond. Yes, thank you Jesus, I'm with you. And we too are like, yes, bring it on, bring that renewal on.

But Jesus went on to give them the details anyway. A little bit before the passage I read earlier, the Gospel of Luke says this: And, as everyone was marveling at all the things he had done, he said to his disciples, "Store these words deep in your ears; for the Son of Man is about to be delivered over into the hands of men." But they did not understand this statement, and it was veiled from them so that they could not comprehend it, and they were afraid to question him about this remark.

Wait. What? That's not renewal. That's more of the same. The good guy delivered into the hands of those in power? The current administration continuing to have its way? A third term by the guy down in Washington? You just said the Kingdom of God has drawn near, it's like the sun, light already visible

just before the dawn. And now you pull it back?

What gives? No wonder they could not comprehend it.

And with all that, I think we might be able to get a better sense of how today's passage from Luke can meet the moment we are in, with the swirling sadness, and anger, and frustration and worry, and more.

The first thing that happens after Jesus tries to reveal to them the real nature of God's kingdom, that it is about the way of beautiful and life-giving, but also challenging and even cross-carrying love, the first thing that happens after he resets the nature of their hopes and expectations, is he sends them out into the world. He's showing that his followers are not going to discover the fullness of his message, the fullness of what's happening, by huddling together and figuring it out. They are going to discover what the Kingdom of God is all about by going out, by engaging with people where they are, as they are, in literally in the midst of their homes and their lives.

When he sends them out, notice that there is no great training session ahead of time. There is no long season of careful preparation for the task these seventy are about to undertake. No preparation. No evaluation to see if these folks have good people skills and have a proper understanding of the message. Jesus picks them. Jesus appoints them. And off they go.

Also notice that he sent them "in pairs" to do this work. Now some people make a big deal of the fact these people are sent in pairs – so they can support each other, work together, help each other when the going gets tough. But the thing that strikes me about this, is what a small number two is. When you go out in twos you are not going to impress anyone with your numbers. No one is going to say, "Oh, here is a big, successful movement. Lots of people are doing it. I should probably get in on it also." No. Two people. Big deal. Come on back when you have some real numbers and maybe I will listen. And the fact that they carry no purse, no bag, and have no sandals, is along the same lines. They are not going to impress anyone. No trendy cell phones. No flashy BMWs or subtle Coach purses. No signs of social standing at all. There you go, just two of you, as you are, without make-up so to speak. You have nothing. Nothing but your message – God's message.

Notice also that there are two parts to this work, actions and words. Cure the sick, and offer the message. Actions and words. And I think we know which of those speaks more loudly. "The way the gospel is known is by one person being for another person the story of Christ."
(Hauerwas) Actions. Actions. Actions. Then words.

And one more bit of this passage to pay attention to today, "do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." In other words, do not rejoice at the results of your work, because YMMV, your mileage may vary, your work may meet with success and it might not. There were places where even Jesus himself could perform no miracles, and Jesus himself was obviously rejected at least as often as his message was welcomed. No, do not rejoice at the results of your work, because the results are up to God, but rejoice that you have been given good work to do, for having good work to do is the same as having your names written in heaven.

You may have figured out by now that this is a sermon about evangelism, even though I haven't used that word before now. Evangelism just means "good-news-ism." And honestly it is probably one of the best words to describe what we are doing here. One of the best words to describe what we are about,

even in, no especially in, a world where so much is amiss. We are trying to embody the good news. In this place, and in that place. Among the people we come in contact with in our lives each and every day.

I know that we, United Church of Christ, are afraid of evangelism. We are afraid of making someone else feel inadequate. We are afraid of not being up to the task. There are 70 of us here today, just like the ones Jesus sent out. We are afraid that someone is going to walk in and say there is not really much going on here. And its all the same to the followers of Jesus. But, my friends, the only way to embody the kingdom of God in the world today. The only way to discover the kingdom of God in the world today, is to be out there in your lives, among other people, living, acting, and maybe once in a while speaking the good news of Jesus.

The good news that through the work that God has given us to do in the name of Jesus Christ, through the spreading of his love, reveal his life and his teachings and his death and his resurrection, through all of that good news, God can renew the world. With all of the swirl that is around us today that we talked about and offered to God in prayer earlier; with all of the swirl that is around us these days, we need to be about that work, that work of good news-ism, not just for the sake of the world, but for our own sake as well. For there we discover, what the fullness of God's worth is all about.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

