

Lectionary 14C 2019, Luke 10:1-11, 16-20, July 7, 2019, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA, Kurt S. Strause

At times I hear something Jesus says, and I just want to say, “Thanks, but no thanks.” Today is one of them. Doesn’t make you just a bit more than uncomfortable to hear him say, “See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.” That doesn’t sound very nice. It sounds downright dangerous. Why would I want to go out into a pack of snarling, hungry wolves if I were a little bitty lamb? Why would Jesus even do that? He knows the danger. I thought he was supposed to be the Good Shepherd and lead us beside still waters and all that.

I could put on my fancy Bible scholar hat and tell you that Jesus doesn’t really mean it. Or it’s just figure of speech. Or he’s not speaking to us specifically but to only a select few of called and sent elders. Although I look around the room this morning and I have to say I see quite a few who qualify for elder, present company included. So I don’t think we can easily dismiss Jesus’ words to us in that way.

Original context is important, however. You’ll recall that Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem. He knowingly approaches a crisis. A crisis of power between his mission of proclaiming the coming of God’s kingdom and the powers that be. Those powers will not yield to the power of God. Eventually those powers will put Jesus on trial and execute him. Here, in Luke’s 10th chapter from which our reading comes this morning, Jesus is still weeks away from that crisis. But the storm clouds are visible on the horizon.

Jesus commissions 70 elders to go ahead of him as an advance team in order to make towns ready to greet him. He gives them warnings about being sent like lambs into wolves. And he gives them specific instructions on what to take and how to act. Pack lightly, depend on the hospitality of others. Be prepared for possible rejection.

You see, Jesus doesn’t want anyone who follows him to be misled. If you’re going to put everything aside and follow Jesus you need to be well informed. There may come a time when your faith in Jesus brings you ridicule, persecution, or even worse. Wolves devouring lambs.

I will readily admit passages like these are difficult to preach. For the simple reason it doesn’t feel like we live in a time or place of wolves and lambs when it comes to living out our faith. When we identify ourselves as Christians we aren’t likely to be persecuted, or ridiculed, or worse. We know there are places in the world where that happens. Where it is illegal to spread the gospel or hold public worship services. Or where your church might be bombed on an Easter Sunday morning. There are places like that. But not here. At least not yet. Still, it’s important for us to imagine ourselves living in those times and places. To be

prepared for a day when your faith in Christ is called into question. Suffering real consequences when asked, “are you a believer in Jesus?”

So, imagining a future that is not here but still may be, what does our passage tell us this morning? How does it help us to live an authentic and relevant faith today?

The first thing I notice is that the disciples are sent out in pairs. No one goes it alone. Living out your faith always requires the support of another. This reminds me of Mormon missionaries who always show up at your door in pairs. But I’m also reminded of what my seminary professor Dr. Eric Gritsch always said about faith. “Faith requires two people, one to tell the Gospel and one to hear it and believe.” We are never alone in our faith, nor should we be. We can’t believe on our own, we can’t be supported on our own. We need each other, and others need us.

The second thing I notice is how lightly Jesus tells the disciples to pack. “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals.” Christian faith doesn’t need a closet full of shoes! In other words, you don’t need a bag full of tricks to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. Attracting others to become followers doesn’t depend on gimmicks. It’s all about relationships. Every time we take our youth on a mission trip we are reminded of this. The leaders always tell us, “Yes, you are here to help, to paint a porch or pack some food, but you are really here to create a relationship. To listen to their story, to share yours, and when you do you will find God at work.” Building relationships doesn’t require a bag full of resources. Just yourself. And a willingness to engage in authentic conversation.

Finally, the disciples are told to rely on the hospitality of others. Here Jesus envisions the missionary activity of the church, literally being sent out into the world to spread the gospel. If the town receives your peace then stay, depend on their hospitality, proclaim the gospel in words and deed. If a town does not receive your peace, then shake the dust of your shoes and move on. Now we aren’t likely to be sent to distant places to proclaim the gospel, but there is still a lesson here. Because I believe what’s at the heart of Jesus’ counsel is an attitude of vulnerability. By depending upon others the disciples place themselves in a vulnerable position. Living out our faith often puts us in a vulnerable place, living “outside our comfort zone” as we like to say on our mission trips. Where is God calling you to live your faith in uncomfortable and vulnerable places?

In the end of all this Jesus issues a promise. “Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” You’ve been to wedding receptions and when you arrive there’s a table with name cards on it. You look for your own and it indicates the table you are to sit. That’s what Jesus is talking about. You’ve got a card with your name written on it. Welcome to the banquet table. Dine with Jesus. Amen.