

## **“Itinerant”**

**Luke 10: 1-11, 16**

**Sermon – July 3, 2022**

Prayer: Loving God, as we ponder on your Word, help us to hear your call as we follow the teachings and the example of Jesus. Amen.

The big word in today’s sermon is “itinerant”. It literally means a person who travels from place to place. Like an itinerant trader or an itinerant performer. My grandfather was an itinerant preacher in the Philippines during World War I. He travelled from village to village, or town to town as a "circuit rider" in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Historically, Bells Corners United Church started as part of a circuit ministry run by itinerant preachers in the early 1820’s, including Merivale, Fallowfield, Richmond and Britannia.

Jesus, too, was an itinerant teacher. The Gospels are full of his travel stories. He moves from place to place, traveling on land and sea. He was accounted for as teaching on hills and on plains, in fields, on boats, in the temple, by a well. Jesus was always on the move. There are many reasons I think that Jesus became an itinerant teacher. His teaching method is one that is not confined to the temple or in synagogues. By being itinerant, Jesus relied on the generosity of others for his food and shelter. Instead of waiting for people to come to him, Jesus went to meet people where they are. This allowed him to speak to people who would not have heard him otherwise. When teaching was confined to the synagogue, the temple or the Rabbi’s home, it was very easy to limit who could hear. By teaching in the open, lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, widows, the poor and women were able to hear him. By traveling to Gentile cities such as Tyre and Sidon, Caesarea Philippi, and the Decapolis, non-Jews and Gentiles were able to listen to him. Jesus went out to meet where the people were!

When we think of Jesus’ followers, we think of the twelve disciples, but there were more.

Today’s reading in Luke presents, to us, Jesus’ instructions to the 72 or, in some versions, 70 followers as they go about the mission of spreading God’s word. Seventy, like the number of

books in the Septuagint -- the translation of the wider collection of books by the Pharisees, were accepted as scripture so that the whole known world in the first century could hear the word of the God of Israel. Seventy, like the number of elders chosen to share Moses' spirit of prophesy and burden of leadership (Numbers 11:16-17). Seventy, like the number of seven times that Jesus' followers are to forgive. Seventy, a number of completion, of wholeness, of inclusivity.

Jesus sends them out in pairs, not individually, and instructs them to rely entirely upon the hospitality of others. That is why he instructs them to travel lightly with no extra bag, no pocket money or extra shoes. They go forth equipped only with their faith and the hope of hospitality. They are vulnerable, and they depend on those they meet along the way to meet their physical needs for shelter, food, and safety. They are encouraged to enjoy whatever is offered by their hosts, and they are not required to stay where they are not welcome.

What are the tasks of these itinerant followers? The task is to live simply and vulnerably. The task is to rely on the grace and hospitality of others. The task is to stay in one place — to encounter, to engage, and to go deep. The task is to live as guests, sharing their faith with others, the people they depend on for sustenance and shelter. The task is to spread peace. The task is to let go with love. The task is to always believe in the abundance and nearness of God's grace.

Jesus reminds the seventy will be going into a hostile world, yet Jesus does not ask them to bring weapons to defend themselves; rather, they will go out like lambs among wolves. He sends them seemingly unprepared and quite uncertain of what they will encounter. And, no matter how hard they try, they cannot control the outcome. The outcome depends totally on God. Some of the people they encounter will not share the message and peace they offer. Sometimes, people will reject them. But, the gift Jesus gives as he sends them is the gift of peace. These followers are sent out into the world offering peace. Embodying peace.

Demonstrating peace by their behavior – material simplicity, acceptance, sharing, working together. By embodying peace, they are showing people what the realm of God is like. They are offering people a new world view. A way to be in right relationship with others.

I find it comforting that Jesus doesn't send the disciples out individually. Seventy is a large number of colleagues and comrades to accompany you and have your back. We need each other in this thing called ministry, in our call to share the good news. We shake the dust off and move on — but we never travel alone.

Like the seventy, we are also called as followers on the move. We are called to be an itinerant community of people to live and share with all others the good news of God's love, grace, healing and peace. This is how we are called to live as we relate to all others, and this is what we are called to proclaim. We are not to stay cocooned in this building. Together, we have been called to go out into the world and announce that God's kingdom is right on people's doorstep! And we go remembering Jesus' promise that he is with us as we invite others into this mission of which we are a part. This is what the world needs from us today - to bring peace to the world. We need to show our commitment to this call where all people are sisters and brothers. One human family. With one home – planet Earth.

No needless suffering is required here. What is required, however, is a sort of vulnerability: the 70 have to rely on the grace and provision of God through the hospitality of others to take care of them on their journey. And as they go faithfully, they get to experience the strength, resilience, and capacity of their bodies to manifest the power of God. The Seventy join all the people of today who travel without resources, a group of wanderers and refugees, and people who have a definite goal, whether it is about a new home or escape from war or, like my grandfather when he traveled from one place to the next, a chance to spread God's message of good news. There have always been such itinerant people on the move, then and now, and they have always met with hospitality, and with hostility.

I doubt Jesus would change his tactics today and sit in the sanctuary waiting for people to come to him. I think he'd still go out there and be on the road.

There's a famous poem that you may be familiar with called "Footprints in the Sand." It is about a person looking back on his life, and noticing that there are two sets of footprints in the sand that represent his life, but at the lowest point of his life, there is only one set. And he turns to Jesus and says, "You promised me that you would walk with me always. How come, in the

hardest parts of my life, there is only one set of footprints? Why weren't you there for me when I needed you the most?" And Jesus answers, "The times when you see only one set of footprints, those are the times when I carried you." You were never alone.

Even when it feels like we're alone, even when it seems like everyone has abandoned us, Jesus says, "I am with you." During these challenging times of COVID, of stressful events, when we are ill, grieving or isolated, it's all too easy to feel alone or abandoned. But we're never alone. That's the gift of being a follower of Christ. God comes to us in many ways, often through the people around us, our companions sent with us on this journey. So, we go – every moment we receive God's blessings at the end of the service, to do our part as itinerant followers, touching every person, every circumstance, every need, with God's peace.

Remember, Jesus didn't wait for people to come to him; he went out to meet them. These instructions clue us into the purpose of our business of following Jesus and his message of God's peace. We are to be representatives of Jesus, announcing the advent of the kingdom of God. Given that purpose, you should leave all the unnecessary stuff at home, but be sure to take along your faith and your courage. We are never, ever alone. For this assurance, thanks be to God. Amen.