

Year C  
4 Pentecost  
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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

I'm so grateful that you decided to take time out of your July 4th weekend to be here!

Today's gospel from Luke describes the sending ahead of the 70 apostles. Earlier, in chapter 9, we heard the story of the sending of the 12 apostles which also appears in Matthew and Mark's versions, but now we see that the number of Jesus' followers has grown so much that he can send these 70 people ahead in pairs, to prepare the groundwork for his ministry. The number 70 is significant in Jewish tradition, because it is a metaphor for all of humanity. In chapter 10 of the book of Genesis, there is a list of all of the nations in the known world; it just so happens that there are 70. So to send 70 apostles is to refer to this idea that they are going out to all the world—not just to the Jews. And as it happens, this is one of Luke's themes: Jesus is the savior of the whole world, not just for God's chosen people.

So they set out hurriedly in pairs, to every place where Jesus intended to go, with “no purse, no bag, no [extra pair of] sandals.” This means that they have nothing to support themselves with, and no change of clothing or shoes. They are completely vulnerable, completely dependent upon the charity of the community. Jesus says he is sending them “like lambs into the midst of wolves.”

Because the culture of hospitality was strong in the ancient world, they knew that some people would welcome them. But because the message they were bringing was radical and subversive, they knew that some people would not. Jesus says to bless those who welcome them by saying “Peace to this house.” In their tradition, peace, *shalom*, is not just about lack of war; it was about flourishing in every way. *Shalom* implies physical and spiritual health, wholeness, prosperity, harmony and inner peace. So if the apostles' blessing of peace was given to a person who welcomed this *shalom*, the blessing would stay with them. If not, the apostles' blessing would sort of bounce back to them. They were instructed to sleep in one house, not look for a different bed every night. Notice Jesus also tells them to eat whatever they're offered. For Jews, that is significant, because you remember they had strict dietary laws. But Jesus is basically telling them that their mission is more important than keeping kosher; they're supposed to eat whatever their hosts offer, even if it isn't on the list of approved foods.

Curing the sick is to be a huge part of their ministry, and remember, especially in Luke's gospel, this will frequently mean casting out demons. Luke often associates physical illness with being afflicted by, or possessed by demons. And, so that people will be sure to know that their cure has been accomplished by Jesus the Messiah, the apostles are to tell people, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” This means that Jesus the Christ (the anointed one), the one who was foretold in prophecy, is now in the world, and in his name we are healing. See how near the kingdom has come to

you? And if people **don't** welcome them, they are to wipe the dust of that place off of their feet in condemnation of them. Yet even to those people, they are to say "the kingdom of God has come near." Even the people who reject them get to hear the good news, whether they believe it or not.

Then Jesus says something very important: "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects *me* rejects the one who sent me." So the people who reject the apostles, are rejecting God. Think about that. It is a huge responsibility to be speaking for God, and that is what these 70 people are doing.

So Jesus sends them out, they have a successful mission, and after a few days, "the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'" In response to that, Jesus says something that seems a bit odd: "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." Theologians interpret this as a prophecy from Jesus, of something that has yet to happen; it will happen when the kingdom arrives. Clearly, Satan was still active then, and is now, so Jesus wouldn't say that he had already fallen. Destruction is Satan's ultimate fate, however. Jesus will be victorious, because God has no equal opposite. I want to say that again: God has no equal opposite. Satan, and demons, are creatures—they are created beings, not gods. They are created beings that have rebelled against God, so, unless they repent, their destiny is destruction. Jesus refers to them as "snakes and scorpions" (this is *not* a passage about handling real snakes or walking on scorpions), but says the real victory isn't the fact that the demons submit to the apostles, but "that your names are written in heaven."

My friends, YOUR names are written in heaven. As baptized Christians, you are the heirs of these 70 apostles. Together, as the Church, WE have been sent out to heal the sick, and to "tread on snakes and scorpions." And to speak for God. What does that look like for you? What does overcoming evil look like in your life? It will be different for each of us, but how is God calling you to serve the kingdom? This week, it could be as simple as inviting someone to come to church with you. Or it could be advocating for, or donating money to a cause that you believe strongly in. It could be caring for a sick family member or friend. What are the snakes and scorpions in your life? God has given you the power to overcome them. But more importantly, **remember** that your names are written in heaven.

Amen.

The Rev. Melanie Lewis  
Christ Church Millwood