July 7, 2013 (Communion Sunday)

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

The Journey of Joy

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Common English Bible (CEB)10:1 After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. 2 He said to them, “The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. 3 Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves. 4 Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don’t even greet anyone along the way. 5 Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘May peace be on this house.’ 6 If anyone there shares God’s peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. 7 Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don’t move from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘God’s kingdom has come upon you.’ 10 Whenever you enter a city and the people don’t welcome you, go out into the streets and say, 11 ‘As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God’s kingdom has come to you.’ 16  Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. Whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” 17 The seventy-two returned joyously, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit themselves to us in your name.” 18 Jesus replied, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19  Look, I have given you authority to crush snakes and scorpions underfoot. I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. 20  Nevertheless, don’t rejoice because the spirits submit to you. Rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.”

It was just a few days ago, July 1, Monday that I drove to Greenland Hills UMC for the first time as the Senior Pastor of this great church. I am so excited to be here and I can not wait to learn more about each one of you and to learn about all that God is doing in and through your lives. I believe that just like the 72 disciples that Jesus sent out we will discover the journey of joy and watch in wonder at all that God can accomplish through the people at this great church. In the scripture 72 disciples are sent to the surrounding villages. No longer safe on the sidelines, these followers are now sent out, to share peace and table fellowship, to cure the sick, to proclaim the kingdom of God. They are called to live out and practice the faith that they have confessed. Through this act they are transformed from bystanders to active participants in the work of God. They are to travel light, but are armed with special powers. When they return, it seems they had great success. These 72 disciples were people who followed Jesus and who shared Jesus’ love with their neighboring community. Those 72 disciples remind me of the Greenland Hills team sent to El Salvador just a few weeks ago to work with Habitat for Humanity to help eradicate inadequate housing and serve the community. The community of Los Buenos taught our Greenland Hills disciples so much about themselves, their lives, and this world. Those 72 disciples that Jesus sent out remind me of the senior high youth from Greenland Hills who went to Chicago to serve with the city and work with the homeless. Next Sunday Greenland Hills sends out more of the 72 when the junior high youth group leaves for their mission trip to Houston to serve the city and homeless. Gary Fox reminds us all to keep these kids and adults in prayer that they will join God where the Holy Spirit is already at work sharing God’s love for all. Greenland Hills is making a difference in this community and throughout the world. Praise be to God. This gospel, my friends, is about us. We are the 72 being sent out. It is the task of us all to tell the Good News to others. We may achieve that task in many different ways, quietly or spectacularly, verbally or by our loving care for others, but the task of showing Jesus to others is one of the chief reasons why we exist. And we have all been empowered to witness in this world.There is something about the Christian faith that simply has to be lived to be understood. There are some gospel truths that only make sense in the homeless shelter, or on the steps of the capitol, or at a hospital bed, or in any one of the great number of places in the world where people cry out for mercy, for bread, for justice, for compassion. Perhaps this is why Jesus sends his followers into the mission field carrying only the message that the kingdom has come. Imagine that you find yourself by a person’s sick bed in the hospital. Everything in you tells you to cut and run. You are extremely uncomfortable, don’t know what to say, feeling inadequate and close to panic. Yet you stay, maybe holding a hand and just sitting there. That action comforts and cheers the sick person. You have used not your talent, but the power given to you in baptism and reinforced every time you receive Holy Communion. Perhaps you are in line at the store; an irate customer is yelling at the sales assistant. It’s not her fault. She is close to tears. When you get to her, your notice her name, speak it to her, smile and offer her silent comfort. In so doing you use the grace given to you in baptism. When I served as a chaplain at Children’s Medical Center there was another chaplain that I thought was a bit of a slacker. He always seemed to be in the cafeteria, reading his Bible. In my opinion he did not seem to be doing enough, he wasn’t visiting enough hospital rooms, he wasn’t going, going, going. But one week in our group session the chaplain supervisor shared something about this particular chaplain. He shared about walking past a hospital room in ICU when this particular chaplain had his hands on the backs of two parents as their child laid in the hospital bed. The supervisor shared how the chaplain had exhibited the very presence of God by staying in that room, and reminding the parents that God was with them. So often we don’t recognize our spiritual gifts because we think they must be spectacular. Yes, the 72 were given the power to cast out evil, but to do so may merely be the offering of goodness and kindness, objective love. That may sound trite. Practicing consistent, objective love, particularly toward people we hardly know, or who are not like us, or are people that repel us by their actions is no trite or easy thing. It’s much easier to lump them in a convenient group, label them, and keep our distance. Being a disciple for Jesus is about making yourself available. In a 2010 survey by Pew Research, 28% of Americans said that they don’t know any of their neighbors by name. It is so easy to hide and to not engage with people, even our next-door neighbors. Being a disciple is about packing light with a spirit of service, a spirit of humility, and a fervent desire to interpret the Good News of Jesus for today’s world. We must remember that it is the kingdom of God we’re inviting people into, not a fan club or a social club. We must pray constantly for guidance in offering the good news, striving to invite people to Christ humbly, sincerely, and joyfully. And we need to know the names of our neighbors! Sometimes the call is to do something we don’t feel capable of doing. We know that we have strengths but the call is not to something we feel is our strength. Yet we are called to do it. God knows we are capable of learning, we just have to trust and obey. Fred Craddock, who taught at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, once said: “To give my life for Christ appears glorious. To pour myself out for others ... to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom — I’ll do it. I’m ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory. We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a $1,000 bill and laying it on the table — ‘Here’s my life, Lord. I’m giving it all.’ But the reality for most of us is that God sends us to the bank and has us cash in the $1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid’s troubles instead of saying, ‘Get lost.’ Go to a committee meeting at church. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Usually giving our life to Christ isn’t glorious. It’s done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it’s harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul.” That’s radical conversion. It is being faithful when no one cares and no one notices. It is spending our 25 cents doing the right thing when no one is watching — when we could have easily given into the wrong thing. It is being faithful in the mundane and ordinariness of everyday life, when it may have been more exciting to do something else, or give in to laziness by doing nothing at all.Christ, present among us this morning, calls us, sends us, and empowers us. We all have a vocation to ministry. Perhaps this coming week, in our quiet times, when we have the opportunity to reflect and to pray, we can consider what task, beyond our strength and or talents, beyond our comfort zone, what task God wants us to take on and embrace. We will embrace that task in the strength of the Holy Spirit, who has lived within us, often unrecognized, since the day we were adopted by God in baptism. When called, go. Where ever you go, proclaim the message of the kingdom of God. Give God your hurt at rejection and failure, and God will heal it and strengthen you to continue. Give God the glory. We are on the journey of joy together. Amen.