

July 7, 2019
Rev. Kerry Smith

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 Won't You Be My Neighbor?
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

New Revised Standard Version

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'

"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me." The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Can you imagine being one of the seventy? Traveling ahead of Jesus to prepare people for his arrival, armed only with the gospel and the hope of hospitality. Depending on those you meet along the way to meet the physical needs for shelter, food, and safety. No money, no backpack, no hiking boots, no food. No guarantee on how you will be received. Jesus encourages them to enjoy whatever is offered by their hosts, but they are not required to stay where they are not welcome.

The seventy aren't heading into friendly territory either. Jesus says they are being sent out like lambs into the midst of wolves. It is dangerous, and they are not supposed to ask for directions! I would not want to sign up for this trip. I like to have my bag packed with snacks and clothes for every kind of weather. My 11 year old went to Boy Scout camp a few weeks ago and the battery powered fan took 6 D batteries. I made sure he took 18 batteries so he had a backup to the backup!

We want to feel secure and prepared before we go out and witness to what we know about God and how we have experienced God's love. We feel like we need to know more or we need to have Bible verses memorized before we say anything about God. In the Pray, Read, Grow book group, the book we are reading is about Islam and this week we talked about how we don't know enough about Islam so when someone says something that isn't in the Quran or isn't correct, we don't know enough to say any different.

When the seventy are sent out, all they have is the promise of Jesus to go with them, to do great things through them, and to bring them home again. However, the seventy are not sent out alone. They go two by two. Each person had a friend in the faith, someone to rely on, someone to depend on. Someone to encourage. Someone to keep faith when yours is gone. Someone to carry on when you feel tempted to quit.

Not only did the seventy travel in pairs, but they were a part of a larger group. No one was going through this alone. But, we don't like to depend on other people. We like to be independent. So, we hold on to things, instead of realizing that it is the people around us who are necessary for our survival. Look around, this is our group of 70. Security is not found through our possessions, but in God and in God's people. As we worship God together today, may we be encouraged by knowing that we are not in this alone.

So often we think faith is all about us. It is my own faith, my own God. We live in America that is all about individualism, but, faith is radically communal. God is with us, the Holy Spirit is with us, and everyone in this sanctuary is with us.

The other day I was listening to Brene Brown talking to Russell Brand on a podcast. They were talking about what boundaries need to be in place for us to have integrity and generosity towards one another. Brene shared about asking a room full of pastors, “Do you believe that people are doing the best that they can?” In general, when people wake up every day, do you believe that they are doing the best that they can? She said that the answer was split with about half of the people said, “No.” They said that people are not doing the best that they can. People are lazy. She asked those who said no to picture someone in their life who they believe is not doing the best that they can.

Think of someone who really irritates you and makes you crazy. Now imagine that God came to you and said that this person that you pictured, they are doing the best that they can right now. Brene Brown said that when she said that, half the people in the room slumped over and some started crying. One person described someone who lives in a trailer in the desert. They have had children removed from their home for neglect. They split the baby’s formula with water and gamble away the rest of the money. If God said that this person was doing the best that they could, they said that they have to make a choice. They can continue to help with a nonjudgmental heart or they need to stop helping because helping through hatred is not helping.

One woman talked about her sister. Her sister was a dancer growing up and now she is a stripper. Her two children see the ramifications of this job. The woman said that if God told her that her sister was doing the best that she could, then she would have to stop being angry and start grieving the loss of a sister that she needed in her life. She said, “I would try to love her but I would have to have boundaries about what is okay in front of my kids.” Brene Brown said that our lives are better when we assume that people are doing the best that they can.

Brene used to work with domestic violence and sexual assault cases. She said that the women who believed that their husbands or partners were doing the best they could, they were the ones who left and got their children out. They said, “I love him, he’s broken right now, and he’s doing the best he can right now and I’m not safe and my kids aren’t safe.” They were able to say here is what is okay and here is what is not. Boundaries are important.¹

We have been looking at spiritual lessons from Mister Rogers Neighborhood and Mister Rogers taught us about empathy. Empathy is a vulnerable choice. If we were to choose to connect with others through empathy, we would have to connect with something in ourselves that knows that feeling. In the face of a difficult conversation, when we see that someone is hurt or in pain, it is our instinct as human beings to try to make things better. We want to fix, we want to give advice. But empathy isn’t about fixing. It is the brave choice to be with someone in their darkness, not to race to turn on the light so we feel better. If someone shares something with us that’s difficult, maybe we can say, “I don’t even know what to say right now. I’m just so glad you told me.” A response rarely makes something better. It is the connection that heals.²

Empathy is about boundaries. Empathy is not jumping into the hole with someone who is struggling and taking on their emotions, or owning their struggle as yours to fix. If their issues become ours, now there are two people stuck in a hole. That is not helpful. Boundaries are

¹<https://www.russellbrand.com/podcasts/>

² This paragraph from Brene Brown. Dare to Lead. Random House, New York. 2018. P. 142.

important. We have to know where we end and others begin if we really want to show up with empathy.³

I keep thinking about Mister Rogers' routine. Every day, Mister Rogers entered the home on his show and did the same things. He sang a peppy song, put on his sweater and changed out of his dress shoes, fed the fish and had a conversation with us the viewer. Routines bring us comfort and peace. A lot of people have a daily morning quiet time because it helps them to begin their day in the same way, in prayer to God. Or every single morning they do the crossword puzzle. A routine that we have in my family is we sit at the table, hold hands, and pray before we eat dinner. Then, we share the favorite part of our day. Sometimes we need to go outside, take a walk, be with friends to remind ourselves of the words that Mister Rogers sang, "It's such a good feeling to know you're alive."

Fred Rogers began each morning with prayer and Bible study, then he would exercise and swim laps at the gym. He said that when he exercised, he could express emotion, especially anger. He made time every day to sit and play the piano. He made taking care of himself a priority. Self-care is so important because human nature hasn't changed much in 2,000 years. There are still people who refuse to see other people as Jesus sees them. There are still people who walk on by, ignoring those left for dead. There are still people who perpetuate patriarchy and protect their power by any means possible. There are still people who refuse to see the sin of white supremacy. There are still people who prop up leaders to save their own skins.⁴ Everyone is not excited to hear that God loves all people.

This scripture talked about shaking the dust off your feet, and that is about persistence. You shake the dust off and move on, certain of the truth of God's love. And then you come back the next day and testify to the truth once again. And the day after that. And that's the hard part.⁵ May God be with us and may we remember that we never go alone. May we go two by two into the next week remembering the words of God. Thanks be to God, Amen.

³ This paragraph from Brene Brown. Dare to Lead. Random House, New York. 2018. P. 142.

⁴ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5364&fbclid=IwAR1ye69PObJKcMktrK96JI-XvuHsg3vo6w8Z9UZj67v-R2VjwTpEO6uSX-8>

⁵ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5364&fbclid=IwAR1ye69PObJKcMktrK96JI-XvuHsg3vo6w8Z9UZj67v-R2VjwTpEO6uSX-8>