

Dusting Off the Feet  
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July 3, 2022 – Pentecost 4/Proper 9C  
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

It sure feels like the world, or at least the country, has gone mad these past couple of weeks. The Supreme Court has overturned several precedents that cover many aspects of our common life, starting with having control over our own bodies and ending with limiting the EPA's ability to limit the effects of carbon going into the atmosphere from certain power plants. The House Select Committee investigating the attempted coup on January 6, 2021 keeps presenting evidence that the event and its lead-up were way worse than anything Richard Nixon and his gang tried during Watergate. Our democracy continues to be under threat thanks to a toxic brew of lies spreading like wildfire on cable news and social media platforms. We've seen the continuation of cult-like behavior on the part of those whose primary allegiance is not to the country many of them swore an oath to preserve, protect, and defend. Feeding both of these are distortions of Christianity which seek power and control over others, instead of lifting up the lowly; and a media environment which is not nearly critical enough of any of it to make a difference in how we think about any of it. It's exhausting, plain and simple. And, it's also not clear what we can actually do about it – especially when it feels like we just might be the lambs who were sent out among the wolves.

Luke is the only gospel account which describes Jesus sending 70 missionaries out ahead of him to proclaim the good news and cure the sick. This event mirrors the sending of the twelve disciples which had happened earlier. Both missions, and their results, are similar. Jesus sends people out, with no extra baggage and instructions to rely only on the hospitality of others, and they return to him with joy and wonder that

even the demons submit to them. It also anticipates what is to come as the result of the missionary work of Peter, Paul, Silas, Barnabas, and countless, unnamed others who are likewise able to do amazing things through the authority Jesus extends to them.

What's at stake with the sending of the seventy are three things.

First: It is one of the earliest hints that the gathering of God's people across the whole world is going to take a lot more people, and a lot more work, than Jesus can handle by himself. It is one of the first attempts in the New Testament to make that gathering happen – and, it also affirms that recruiting help is not only desirable, but can also be a lot more effective than trying to go it alone.

The second thing which is at stake here is the power of good to triumph over evil, as Jesus suggests when he says he has given the seventy "authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt [them]" (Luke 10:19, NRSV). Which begs the question: what does it take to defeat evil? The only thing that's certain in this text is, that it takes the seventy working in the name of Jesus, with his own authority extended directly to them. The implication is that "Jesus is Lord" – that is, since Jesus shares in God's nature, he also shares in God's ability to deal directly and effectively with what is antithetical to the good. It's a sign that the kingdom of God has come near, regardless of whether the hearer of the news is able to receive it with joy, or not. And THAT is good news not matter in which era it's heard! It doesn't take human agency to make it happen. Our task is to proclaim it, and then to live as if it really is here. That's it. It's a tall order at times. That said, opening up the very possibility of its nearness is at least an order of magnitude harder, so it's a good thing that piece of it is not up to us.

The third, and arguably most important, thing is that the practice of hospitality is part of the deal. Ancient norms obligated people to provide a meal and a bed for anyone who knocked on their door. They were further required to not harm someone who had made that ask, even in cases where help was not possible. In addition, "The command to greet householders with 'peace' is not only adopting Jewish common practice, but it characterizes the message of Jesus' good news, fulfills the promise" of peace on earth and goodwill to all announced by the angels at the time of Jesus' birth.<sup>1</sup> There's hope here, of "the hope of the world to come" variety. It reminds us that God ultimately has us, and that no matter how rough things might get, God will somehow make it better.

One other key piece of the practice of hospitality is Jesus' instruction to shake the dust from their feet when the message of good news for the poor and healing for the sick is rejected. It points to the dual necessities of "not treating [other people] as objects upon which we act, but as sacred other with whom we are called to be fully and peacefully present. If they do not share this peace, Jesus does not advise reactivity, scorn or polemics. Instead he reassures his followers that their peace is not diminished and cannot be taken away from them..."<sup>2</sup> In other words: if they reject your message, it's more than likely about them, not you. The best course is to move on, not to attack them. Hitting someone in the face, or using a news commentary program or social media to slander someone who rejects us is plain old human nature. But, at the same

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<sup>1</sup> Mikeal C. Parsons, "Commentary on Luke 10:1-11, 16-20."  
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-14-3/commentary-on-luke-101-11-16-20-2> [accessed June 27, 2022].

<sup>2</sup> Amy G. Oden, "Commentary on Luke 10:1-11, 16-20."  
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary-14-3/commentary-on-luke-101-11-16-20-4> [accessed June 27, 2022].

time, it's gotten us into trouble on countless occasions throughout the course of history. Nor does it get us very far as an evangelism tool to beat someone over the head, literally, with the gospel. Of course, Jesus was very much aware of all of that, so it should not come as a surprise that he would advocate openly for the relatively restrained action of wiping the dust off one's feet and letting it fall where it would.

One of the reasons the advice to shake off the dust and move on is that people haven't changed all that much in 2000 years. Technology aside, "Perhaps our world is really no different than the mission field into which Jesus' disciples were sent... We would do well to do our witness work with eyes wide open and expect rejection sooner rather than later. Those who refuse to see others as Jesus sees them. Those who walk on by, ignoring those left for dead. Those who perpetuate patriarchy and protect their power by any means possible. Those who refuse to see the sin of white supremacy. Those who prop up leaders to save their own skins – in the end do not want the Kingdom of God near. Because when the Kingdom of God is near, it is then indeed when the lack of empathy and the dearth of understanding will be exposed and you can expect the trolls to start their trolling."<sup>3</sup>

That lack of empathy and understanding is part of the explanation for how our country has gotten to the precarious place in which it finds itself right now. The aspiration of "liberty and justice for all" is just that, an aspiration – especially if it has a disclaimer or exceptions attached to it. It will be part of the story our children will write about our undoing if we can't be bothered to actually try to empathize with and understand our neighbors, especially the ones who have had to fight for the liberty and

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<sup>3</sup> Karoline Lewis, "Dear Working Preacher: Shake off the Dust." <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/shake-off-the-dust> [accessed June 27, 2022].

justice they have historically lacked. It's not too late to fix much of what ails us – which is something I think we can all agree on, regardless of our political inclinations.