

## “Fighting Back Peacefully”

Luke 10: 1-12; 17-20

We continue our Lenten journey with another commissioning story. As Jesus makes his way toward Jerusalem, he again sends out his disciples to towns where he intends to go. This time, we are told, that he sends out his disciples plus we can only assume other people who have also been following Jesus this whole time. Because Luke tells us that seventy people were sent out. We can assume that like the original twelve, these other 68 people have also experienced the life-giving, life-changing message of God’s peace, that they were also ready and willing to serve with Jesus, all because they too identified with his radical message of love and grace. We can assume that like the original twelve, these other 68 people were all ready to answer the call to be prophets, ready to bring hope and wholeness to and for all as they went out, announcing the coming of God’s Kingdom.

In just a few short verses from Chapter 9 to Chapter 10, suddenly we have the start of a movement. It is not just Jesus and his followers anymore. People are joining in. People were wanting to be a part of this exciting new thing God is doing. Suddenly in just a few short verses, we have gone from the original twelve to seventy. We can see the beginnings of a movement, a movement that announces the coming of the Kingdom of God.

This is an exciting time for the disciples. They have already answered the call to follow Jesus and now...now, he is sending them out on their own. This is not just some ordinary journey they are embarking on. This is something new for them. This is a new experience for them. This is a new beginning for them.

They are to go and proclaim that the Kingdom of God is near. They are to take no bag and no purse with them. They are to bring no extra pair of sandals and greet no one on the road. With the same focused attention as when he set his face toward Jerusalem, Jesus gives them instructions about their mission. The disciples realize that for this new mission, they are to dedicate themselves to the prophetic message of God's peace and let nothing, nothing distract them from sharing it with all that they met.

I have to tell you, every time I read this passage, I am amazed. I cannot imagine preparing for a journey and not taking stuff with me. If and when we do go on a trip, I always anticipate for just about anything to happen, taking extras of our extras just to be prepared. Our car is usually filled with extra books, extra toys, extra charging cords, extra snacks, extra bottles of water just so that we will not be without, just so we will have it if we might need it, whatever that "it" may be.

So knowing how I prepare for a trip and hearing how Jesus tells the disciples to prepare for their trip, I can honestly say, I cannot imagine how the disciples would be feeling at this moment, especially when Jesus tells them to leave it all

behind and just go.

I guess I really shouldn't read too much into this whole packing for the journey thing. After all, the disciple left a lot of their stuff behind already when they answered Jesus' call to follow him. They left their homes. They left their jobs. They left their families. They left belongings. They had already left everything behind to follow Jesus when he called.

However even knowing all this, something feels different about this commissioning, something feels different about this sending out for the disciples. Something more is going on in this text than the disciple simply packing for a journey. Something is different about this sending out, this commissioning for the disciples then when Jesus first called to them and invited them to follow him.

Maybe the difference is because now a transition is happening for the disciples. No longer are they just following Jesus around. No longer are the disciples in the background, there only for crowd control while Jesus preaches and teaches. Now the disciples are going out on their own. They are going out into Galilee without Jesus leading them. They are going out seeking other like-minded people without Jesus being the front man for this new movement.

In this sending out, it is just them. Sure, they will be in pairs but there will be no large groups to hide behind. There will be no large crowds to get lost in as

they go through towns. It is just them...sharing the message of God's peace with all that they meet along the way.

Think about it...2 people is a lot different from 70. In pairs, they will be vulnerable. They will have to rely on other people's hospitality. They will only have the message of God's peace with them, guiding them, leading them, helping them live out their calling as disciples of Jesus.

With this transition from follower to prophet the disciples will now be the ones bringing the Word of God to the towns, not Jesus. They will be the ones who will share the good news of God's love and peace. As they transition from followers to speakers, they soon will become the faces and the names behind this new movement, this new movement which announces healing and wholeness, this new movement which announces hope and justice. No longer can they, when asked to speak to someone connected to this new "Jesus movement, no longer can the disciples point to Jesus, say "His is your man" while they slide anonymously into the background. With this sending out, with this commissioning, the disciples are now leaders in this new movement which at first reading seems innocent enough but in reality, the message of God's Kingdom is subversive. It is subversive because it announces that a new Kingdom is coming. It challenges the very power of the Roman Empire. By announcing the coming of a new Kingdom, the disciples are now stirring up trouble, they are standing up to the powers that be, the very

same authorities that Jesus has already faced and will face again when he enters into Jerusalem. This new journey is not all fun and games for the disciples. They are being sent out like lambs among the wolves and not everyone will be happy that they coming into their towns, stirring up trouble, causing problems, and announcing a new Kingdom is near.

I've lived with this text this past week, I have wondered why this difference in the disciples' calling, why this transition of leadership matters to us today as modern day disciples. After all, this transition happened over two thousand years ago. Why should we care that Jesus is sending the original 12 plus 68 others to go out into Galilee and announce that the Kingdom of God is near? The disciples did all the hard work years ago. They were the ones who faced persecution and death as they lived out their call to be followers of Jesus Christ, not us. As modern day disciples, those disciples years ago set us up for a pretty easy existence when it comes to living out our call as disciples of Christ. We don't have to worry that we will be arrested for speaking up for justice. We don't have to worry that we will be silenced if we challenge the powers of our nation. As modern day disciples, we can just sit back, and let these stories of Jesus make us feel good about ourselves while ignoring their subversive undertones of inclusive love and justice bringing shalom. As modern day disciples, why should we care about the differences in the disciples' calling, the difference in their commissioning stories, stories that

transition them from just being disciples following Jesus to prophets announcing God's peace?

While pondering this question of transition in calling for the disciples, I should probably also share that I had something else beyond the text compelling me to explore these questions of differences in the disciples' call stories. I had one more key element staring back at me the whole time while I prepared this sermon. If you turn to the front of your bulletin, you will see a picture of Rosa Parks.

This picture of Rosa Parks was taken after she was arrested...all because she refused to give up her seat on a bus for a white man. There she is, with her prisoner number displayed across her chest. The quiet defiance in her eyes says it all. This picture would not let me go. Her face compelled me to think about all those moments throughout history when we as people of faith have been called into action, called into becoming instruments of God's peace, moments like when people in Nazi Germany put their lives and families on the line while they hid Jews in their homes, sometimes risking it all to help them escape, moments like when in China, a young man stood in front of a tank, blocking its path, preventing it from moving forward into a line of protestors, Or moments when workers rush into bombed buildings in Syria to rescue innocent children, children who are simply caught in a war that has no end, children who have no voice in the politics that are tearing their world apart.

In preparing for this sermon, I should tell you that I had this text about commissioning the disciples to bring the Word of God's peace in one hand and this picture of Rosa Parks, a woman whose act of bravery and courage inspired others to become instruments of God's peace, in the other hand. And while holding these two images side by side, it hit me once again that what we say and do as people of faith matter, how we live out our faith matters, how we courageously transition from just being followers of Jesus to prophets announcing that the Kingdom of God is near matters because....because in moments like these, where the very character and nature of the Kingdom of God challenges the principles and might of the powers that be, these are times when our faith becomes real for us. No longer are they just words on a page. Our faith compels us to get involved. Our faith compels us to speak out. Our faith inspires us to become instruments of God's peace, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

As people of faith who have embraced the call to follow Jesus, to follow the very one who spoke out against the injustices he saw during his ministry, our call to discipleship shapes us. It shapes how we interact with others. It shapes how we treat others. It shapes us into becoming the people God created and calls us to be...people who continue to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God and share God's peace with all that we meet through our words and our actions. It matters because we are called to practice what we preach.

No longer can we simply sit in the background as followers, acting as crowd control while others preach and teach, then get frustrated because no one seems to care about their neighbors anymore. No longer can we pretend that our faith is about just us. No longer can we ignore our call to announce the coming of God's Kingdom even if we have to go out of our comfort zones and interact with "others" to do it.

Because you see, we are on a journey. We are on a journey that will lead us straight to the heart of where the powers that be reside. We are on a journey to Jerusalem and the closer we get to Jerusalem, the more that will be expected of us, the more that will be asked of us... We will be asked to stay up in the Garden with our Savior. We will be asked to break the bread of life and drink from the new covenant. We will even be asked if we know this man, this man from Galilee who has been proclaiming a new Kingdom to come. The world is waiting, waiting to see if we have the courage and strength to speak up, ready to answer the call of God's shalom when it comes. The world is waiting to see if we have the strength and the courage to be prophet of peace in a time when so many need to know that that the Kingdom of God is near.

Like for the disciples back then, now is the time for us to transition from simply being followers of Jesus to prophets of peace, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God has come near for all of God's children. Yes, we are being sent

out like lambs among the wolves to proclaim a new Kingdom. But this call to go out into our communities is too important for us to ignore any longer. This Kingdom which is founded on life, rather than death which is founded On relationship, rather than enmity, this Kingdom can come near to and for all of God's children if we just go out and engage in, if we accept mutual hospitality, rather than building walls of division." Now is the time to shake the dust off our feet and go proclaim that the Kingdom of God is here, even if it means we will be challenging the powers that be, risking it all, just to stay true to this call...this call to follow our Savior who spoke out time and time again, who spoke out against the injustices he saw, our Savior whose very message of peace this world tried to silence.

Or let me say it this way. History would like to tell us that Rosa Parks' one true act of courage was that she refused to give her seat up on that fate-filled day. But her story is so much more than just that one moment. Rosa Parks had long been a member of the NAACP. She had long been working against segregation. She had long been working against the unfair treatment of African Americans concerning the buses in Montgomery. She had already had one run in with that particular driver of the bus. He had evicted her before because she would not go around to the back door after she had entered the bus from the front.

Rosa Parks didn't wake up and decide on December 1, 1955 "Oh, today's the day I'm going to make history and start a movement". It had already begun. Other speakers and leaders in the movement were already having conversations about desegregating the buses with the city officials. People were already working to bring the radical change of healing and wholeness near for all the people in that community.

So for me, what gets lost in Rosa Parks' story is that while we are celebrating how she stood up for herself, how she acted in courage and bravery, what gets lost is that on that particular day, there was a transition for Rosa Parks. She moved from just being in the background, a follower letting others do all the speaking and preaching to becoming a prophet, to becoming a voice of hope, to becoming a messenger of God's peace. On that day, She inspired others to become instruments of God's peace as well. She inspired others to break down walls of division. She became a prophet, announcing the coming of God's Kingdom that day and days to come because...her greatest legacy is, not that she refused to give up her seat but that she inspired a certain young preacher who was new in town, a Martin Luther King Jr, to lead the Montgomery Improvement Association and the subsequent bus boycott. And we all know how this disciples turned prophet lived out his calling to announce the coming of God's Kingdom. He did so, right up until

the day he died. Just think of how history would have been different if Rosa Parks had not embraced her call to become a prophet for the Kingdom of God...

In an interview with Rosa Parks later in her life, a reporter asked her: On that day in December 1955, **Did you think your actions would have such a far-reaching effect on the Civil Rights movement? To which she replied:** I didn't have any idea just what my actions would bring about. At the time I was arrested... I had no fear at that particular time. I was very determined to let it be known how it felt to be treated in that manner — discriminated against... When I did realize, I faced it, and it was quite a challenge to be arrested. I did not really know what would happen...but I was willing to go to let it be known that under this type of segregation, black people had endured too much for too long. I was not going to be silent anymore.”

On that fateful day, Rosa Parks became a prophet. She became an instrument for God's peace and the ripple effects are still being felt today. May we have the courage and strength to do the same. Amen.