

One of the ways that we frequently tend to describe ourselves when it comes to our identity as children of God, as Christians in particular is by saying that we're "resurrection people." It's a beautiful phrase that reminds us perpetually who we are. We are people who believe that death does not have the final say, we are people who believe in ultimate hope, we are people who believe that Christ came to earth, died a very human death, and rose again in the ultimate act of love and salvation for us. It's our way of proclaiming that we are a new and hopeful creation, reborn in the light of the resurrection, which calls us to proclaim that light and that hope out in the world. I mean, we very much take our identity from the Great Commission. Go ye therefore and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and declaring the beauty and the hope of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, but it begs the question. If we didn't have that designation as resurrection people, if we didn't have that as our framework for how we talk about and live out our faith, what exactly would we have to say about it? It is this question that rises up out of our gospel this morning as we pair our steps to the disciples as they go out into the world to proclaim the gospel.

Jesus has just gone through this moment of talking to people who are would-be followers. Those who are struggling to fully consider the entire

picture when it comes to following Jesus. He has told them about not having a place to lay their heads, about needing to leave everything behind, about needing to just go now, no goodbyes, no time to pack a bag, nothing. Jesus has basically laid out that to follow him is to lead a life that is filled with risk and sacrifice and isn't exactly a walk in the park. With that in mind he then proceeds to commission not only the disciples, but also 58 others, bringing the total up to 70 who are sent out to proclaim the good news to all the towns and villages that Jesus intends to go.

This is no cushy assignment. If that wasn't apparent from Jesus' previous conversations with people who were desiring to follow him, it becomes so when he gives them their instructions for how they're to go out. He tells them that they are to take no provisions with them. They are to basically approach this sending out like they're the fated passengers of the SS Minnow and they're about to rock the Gilligan's Island version of the gospel. No purse, no sandals, no bag. Nothing extra. Nothing that they just might need. Only the necessities are to go with them and for everything else they are to rely upon the kindness of strangers. This is no easy task. Go out into this wide Roman world where they will face hostility and rejection and spread the good news.

Jesus tells them this isn't all going to be smooth sailing. He tells them that there will be places that will reject them, places that will want nothing to do with them, places that will not listen. They aren't to take this to heart. They're just supposed to move it along to the next town. When they find a place that is ready and willing to listen, they're to ask them for basically everything they need, room, board, open conversation, peace. I gotta say, if I'm a disciples, I'm struggling way more with the necessity of asking complete strangers if I can stay in their house, compared to the previous group of would be followers who were warned off because they might not have anywhere to sleep. I'll take the ground over a stranger's house any day but maybe that's just me.

So, the seventy have their marching orders. Go spread the word and pack light. However, as I was thinking through this text, it hit me, what in the world is the word that they're going out to spread when Jesus' death and resurrection haven't happened yet? I mean they're heading to towns Jesus hasn't even been to yet, he's not even halfway through his ministry, so what exactly are they being commissioned to say? What message are they being called to spread? And if we were them, how exactly would we talk about Jesus if we didn't have the message of the resurrection to fall back on?

The question forces us to explore what else lies at the heart of our faith when we take a step back from the ultimate end point. *What else* is there to talk about when it comes to faith and Jesus if we aren't talking about salvation and eternal life? For some of us, maybe the answer is nothing. Maybe the end game is the point. But if the end game is the one and only point, then why would Jesus have risked the lives of 70 followers to go out and spread the good news before that good news had fully arrived yet? So, what else did Jesus want put out into the world by his followers then? And what possibly could Jesus want put out into the world by his followers now?

They have watched Jesus build a community of followers who have the expectation to love and care for one another. For the twelve especially, they would know that a huge part of the kingdom of God being near is a radical reorientation of what it means to be a community. There is no more calls for individualism and taking care of your own, hunkering down and selfishly only focusing on your own needs. From now on you are a part of the larger body of Christ, where all are equal, all social hierarchies crumble, and no one is better than anyone else which means no one has a right to demand preferential treatment because of who they are.

I think as followers of Christ today we tend to think that we have lofty ideals of this because well we're here aren't we? We're members of a

church, we know what community means. But do we? How often when a conflict or question comes up to we feel that our opinion should be deferred to because we've been here longer or our family goes back generations or because we give the most money? How often do we form our faith communities off of our societal preferences rather than based upon a simple call of come all ye that love the Lord? We form communities were most of us look alike, are in the same economic bracket, and think relatively similarly, and we can say it's just what happens, but there is a part of that that is a choice. We form the communities we want, and they don't always look like the fullest expression of the kingdom of God.

The seventy would have known that Jesus called for a radical welcoming of others, particularly those on the margins, those whom society had forgotten, that there was no come back when you fit x, y, z category, there was simply come as you are. They would have seen the community around Jesus made up of fisherman and tax collectors, men and women, parents and children, the sick, the forgotten, the lonely, the lost, the distrusted, the marginalized, the stranger, the foreigner. They would have gone into these towns and declared all were welcome and mean it, not just pay it lip service and then put everyone through the rigors of a membership process. Come as you are and hear the good news.

Again, we might have lofty impressions of how welcome we make others feel, but when we're honest with ourselves, we know that radical welcome is not always what we do best. We put up barriers to welcome based on race, gender, sexual orientation, anything that we deem important. We probably like to imagine that Jesus' community was a bunch of straight, white, middle class people with 2.5 kids. It wasn't. There would have been people with a wide variety of skin colors and backgrounds, and sexual orientation is a thing as old as time itself so there is no way all of the people following Jesus were straight. They were rich and destitute. Single, married, widowed, separated. They ran the gamut, and Jesus called his community to radically welcome them all, and that call has not changed, as much as we would like to convince ourselves that Jesus says it's perfectly ok to exclude who we want to.

At the end of the day, Jesus sent out the seventy with the message that the kingdom of God had drawn near to them, which called for a radical reorientation of every facet of their lives. How they addressed community, how they addressed hospitality, how they addressed their individual relationships with money, possessions, politics, power, ambition. It was a kingdom that favored the weak and the lost, the forgotten and the pushed away. It was a kingdom that declared forgiveness and compassion above all

else. That is what the seventy were going out to these towns and villages to proclaim. The kingdom of God is near so get busy loving each other, genuinely and openly no matter what.

We are still waiting for the kingdom of god to fully become known and that means that our call is the same as the seventy. While it is true that we can go out and proclaim that we are resurrection people and thus can expound words of hope and eternal life and salvation, it doesn't make the need to call for hospitality, love, and compassion any less. We are the body of Christ, sent out to proclaim the good news, and the good news goes far beyond heaven. The good news is about heaven *on earth*, and that means welcoming all of God's children, embracing who we are, and orienting our lives based on God's call, not on our own preferences because we trust that ultimately we're going to go to heaven so who cares how we live our lives while we're here.

Everything matters. Everything. Who we are, what we proclaim, how we act, the lives we live. It begs us to ask ourselves the question, if a pair of the seventy showed up in our own towns, our own lives, and proclaimed all of these things, would we welcome them and have them wish us peace, or would we reject what they were preaching and watch them wipe the dust off their feet and move on to those more willing to hear? **AMEN!!!**