

6th Sunday after Pentecost
Lectionary 14/Proper 9 (C)
July 4, 2010

Text: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
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I have dual citizenship. I am a citizen of the United States of America. I received my citizenship by virtue of being born in this country, to parents who are also citizens. I place great value on being an American citizen and on the freedoms I enjoy—especially the freedom of religion and freedom of speech. I also place great value on the responsibilities that go with those freedoms—the responsibility to vote, to obey the law, to pay taxes. And today, July 4th, I celebrate and give thanks for being an American. In the history of human societies, it is a profound and rare thing to be a free person in a free land, not to be required to bend the knee before any other person or thing. I give thanks for my country, for my freedom, and for my citizenship as an American.

I am also a citizen of the reign of God. As St Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, my true citizenship is in heaven. I received this citizenship as a gift from God when I was baptized. I place great value on being a citizen of the kingdom of God. It means that I am part of God's great work to bring healing and wholeness to all of creation. It means that, even as every human kingdom and nation comes and goes, I belong to something that is eternal. I also place great value on the responsibilities that go with belonging to the reign of God—to love God with my whole heart, mind and soul, and to love my neighbor as myself. And today I celebrate and give thanks for belonging to God in Christ. I give thanks that by the mercy and goodness of God alone I have been received as a child of God and my true citizenship is in the reign of God.

This dual citizenship is tremendously important for me, for how I see the world and how I try to conduct my life. I imagine the same is true for you as well. And as it happens, our scripture readings for today have something interesting to say to us about being people with this sort of dual citizenship.

Our gospel story tells of Jesus sending seventy of his followers to go ahead of him everywhere he intended to go. Now there's something interesting about the number seventy. In the ancient world there was a notion that in the human family there were seventy nations, each with its own language and culture and traditions. People thought of the human family tree as having seventy distinct branches. So as Jesus sends seventy of his followers out, there's a hint of what will in fact happen later. After Jesus has died and been raised, he sends his followers to every nation—from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria, and on to the ends of the earth.

And it's still happening today in all those symbolic 70 nations, because there are still people who know nothing of Jesus, people who don't know about Jesus' way of forgiveness and peace. What Jesus said then is still true today: The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. This is one essential element of our citizenship in

heaven. We belong to God in love, and our lives have been caught up in God's great, loving work of gathering a harvest from every nation, from every branch of the human family. Like those seventy followers that Jesus sent out, we are also Jesus' representatives. In our every-day lives, we represent Jesus and his healing, life-giving work.

Jesus gave those seventy men and women some very specific instructions about what they were supposed to do. In many ways, those instructions are so completely rooted in the first century that we can't pull them up and transplant them into the 21st century. But there is a quality of spirit about them, something that people then saw and responded to. That same quality of spirit can inform how we represent Jesus in our time. Jesus told those first century followers not to carry any purse or bag or sandals. Instead, they would carry just three things with them—peace and community and healing. And wherever we represent Jesus, we carry those three things as well.

Jesus sent the 70 with a greeting of peace, and with lives that showed that peace. He said they would be like lambs in the midst of wolves. It's ironic and sad that in our time the word "Christian" is heard by many as a label for self-righteous cultural warriors. Imagine, though, what a lived witness to peacefulness could mean for our world, if people could experience Christians as people who are at peace with themselves and at peace with others. There's no guarantee that the world would receive that witness. Jesus says that even so, God's kingdom has come near.

As the 70 went out, they also brought community with them. In that time and that place, when a stranger came to town, people were obligated to show hospitality, to invite them to eat at their table, to sleep under their roof. When Jesus' followers accepted that kind of welcome, they in turn would share everything they had with the people of that town—Jesus' message of peace, his acceptance of everyone, his word of forgiveness, his open table fellowship. And in doing so, they began to create a community shaped by Jesus' values. We call that community "church." It's sad that, in our time, many people think of church as a one-hour-per-week sort of thing. Imagine experiencing church as the community of people with whom we share our lives and where there's a place for everyone.

The 70 also brought a gift of healing with them. Jesus told them to set people free from the powers of evil and share the blessing of life with God. This is a profound, spiritual kind of healing, different from a medical cure, that comes with being set free from worry and fear, knowing that we're forgiven, that we are children of God, and that there is nothing that is able to separate us from the God who created us and who loves us.

Only three things to carry—peace, community, healing. It might not seem like much, but it is. I believe every one of us wants to make a difference in the world, to do something of real and lasting value with our lives. And we can, although it's not because we're so wise or wonderful. It's because of the gifts Christ has given us.

They're gifts that we share here today—peace, community, healing. We gather under the promise of God's forgiveness, which touches our hearts with God's own peace. We gather here, coming together from our own individual lives, and as we sing and pray together we discover the deep truth that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family. We are a community together—and there's a place for us here no matter who we are. And together we open our hearts to receive the gifts God has for us today, gifts to heal every troubled spirit, to renew our hope, to give us strength.

Our journey doesn't end here. Like the 70, we'll go out from here, carrying those precious gifts of peace and community and healing, so we can represent Jesus, so that his amazing work of love can happen in us and through us. Because all of us are dual citizens, of our homeland and of God's kingdom, we go out from here to be instruments of God's blessing for our land. The harvest truly is plentiful. May God's work be done by our hands. Amen