

# Sermon: Pentecost 7

The Rev. Mike Wernick

July 3, 2016

Year C

Isaiah 66:10-14

Psalm 66:1-8

Galatians 6:7-16

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

When I meet with the Vestry and Council... at our monthly joint-leadership meetings... I report on what I accomplished the previous month... how many liturgies I prepared for and at which I presided... how many diocesan and synod... deanery and conference meetings and events I attended... how many planning and other meetings I led or attended... how many pastoral care visits I made... bible studies I led and clergy bible studies I attended... how many church community or Grand Rapids community events I attended as a representative of Two Churches... whether I attended any professional development events... and how many emails I received... and how many I sent...

It's always enough to keep me busy... and I am always appreciative for this call... for this vocation... and I am always appreciative for so very many of you who make what I do possible... staff and volunteers who contribute in one or more ways to the life of this community... I do not do what I do in a vacuum... and I could not do it alone... but I remind myself regularly that whatever contributions I make to spreading the Gospel... to bringing God's forgiveness and blessing... whatever insights I share through my preaching and teaching and the private conversations I have with you... it is a small piece... there is more work to do... than I could ever do...

Sometimes it's easy to think that we're the ones making things happen... oh we certainly do have free will... we certainly can decide what to have for breakfast... or what movie to see... or which car to buy... or who to marry... or where to live...

But we can't decide where a volunteer tomato plant will sprout up... or how a river will meander across its landscape... or how global plates will shift... or the rotations of the planets... or the movements of the galaxies...

But we can decide which impulses of the human heart we follow... we can decide what we take to heart... whether to forgive... or hold a grudge... whether we tell those we love how much we love them... or let something get in the way of that... we can decide to pursue those things which foster peace... or not...

In the ELCA... there's a brief theological statement that reflects this truth... and which can help us focus our efforts... God's Work... Our Hands... sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that it's our work... and sometimes we resist it... sometimes we want someone else to do it... but that's OK... God's not in a hurry... God can wait... God is willing to let us learn... what we need to learn... at the pace we choose... and there are lessons we need to learn individually... personally... and there are lessons we need to learn corporately... as the body of Christ...

Sometimes we forget... or act as though we forget... that everything's connected... we forget that we're branches connected to a vine... we forget that one country's border... is connected to another country's border... we forget that how we behave... doing unto others as we'd have others do unto us... is more important than what we believe...

The prophet Isaiah reminds us... that restoration is an ongoing pattern of the human condition... remembering the tenderness of God... the vision of a nursing mother... he also remembers the invaders who desecrated Jerusalem... led its citizens to captivity in Babylon... and the passion for vengeance against those who violated mother and child rises up too...

Viewed from this perspective... Isaiah's move from mothering God to slaughtering God makes sense... this is how the human heart can work... filled with a vision of a redeemed future... it imagines with equal force the divine wrath descending on those who led us through hell...

Preaching Professor Thomas Troeger believes that Isaiah's apocalyptic song ends too soon... he thinks it ought to end with vv. 15 and 16... not with v. 14... as today's lectionary does... he wonders whether those who compiled the lectionary... omitted these two verses because they didn't want anyone to use them to justify murderous actions... *for the Lord will come in fire... and his chariots like the whirlwind... to pay back his anger in fury... and his rebuke in flames of fire... for by fire will the Lord execute judgment... and by his sword on all flesh... and those slain by the Lord shall be many...*

Troeger asks: Are there not enough victims of **human** violence that **God too** must join in the bloodshed... I find it irresponsible [he wrote] not to challenge such a horrifying image of God... but perhaps those who produced the lectionary left these verses out precisely for this reason... they did not want to perpetuate the misuse of God's name for violent purpose...

When I was almost twenty-eight... I went to Air Force basic training... I was at the upper end of the age-range for enlistment... which means I was just about as old as you could be... and still enter the military... I mostly knew... that they'd provide everything I needed... you know... boots and belts... fatigues and dress blues... and other things... and I can't tell you why... not sure I know... but I packed a huge suitcase anyhow... I packed like I was going on vacation... for months... like I was going someplace fun... I didn't pack like I was going into the Air Force... and what I brought... the amount of stuff I brought... the kinds of things I brought... ended up getting me yelled at... and ended up getting me in trouble... before I was sent to work in a medical laboratory... but that's another story...

Jesus appointed seventy others... and said *Go on your way*... he sent them to every town and place where he himself intended to go... as messengers... like little John the Baptists... and he said... *carry no purse... no bag... no sandals... and greet no one on the road*... in other words... don't bring anything that will get you robbed... pack so

lightly you don't need a bag... and while you're at it leave your psychological baggage at home too... if you have no sandals... you'll need to walk softly... and don't create any delays by engaging people on the road... this work is important... it is risky to have so little... but it is also risky to pack too much... when you pack too much... you can spend more time trying to remember where things are... than doing what you're there to do...

And when you get settled somewhere... don't move about... don't reject hospitality... it's hard to come by... let your peace rest on the people and place where you're welcomed... and let go of all worldly measures of success... don't count how many demons you exorcise... don't rejoice at this... it's not about you... just rejoice that your names are written in heaven...

In Matthew 21:33... Jesus told a parable about the landowner who planted a vineyard... and when it was time to collect his produce... he sent three slaves... but the tenants seized them and beat... killed... and stoned them... so he sent more slaves and these were treated the same way... so he said... I'll send my son... they will respect him... but they seized and killed him too...

*Whoever listens to you listens to me... and whoever rejects you rejects me... and rejects the one who sent me...*

It can be difficult to be the lamb... sometimes we want to be the wolf... it can be difficult to be the messenger... sometimes we want to be the King... it can be difficult to be the branch... sometimes we want to be the vine... even though what's flowing through us is not ours... sometimes we want the slogan to be... Our Work... Someone Else's Hands...

But we are sent to prepare the soil... we are sent to announce the Kingdom... we cannot make people accept it... and so we shake dust and move on... and what's freeing... is that it's not all up to us... the success or failure of the world does not

depend on what we do or don't do... it's not dependent on what we pack or don't pack... what we need will be provided... we act because we are called to act... but we let go of our actions so that the Holy Spirit can work in... through... and around us... and when our own efforts to identify God's purpose and presence fall short... the Gospel is not diminished... we are not marked by our lofty ideals or by our failures... we are marked by Christ... sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever...

Roman Catholic Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw... wrote a prayer in remembrance of Archbishop Oscar Romero... called *A Step Along The Way*...

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction  
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of  
saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

And for this I say... Amen.

Mike+