

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, Jul 3, 2022

The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Eucharist

11 a.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Alison Turner, *Associate for Children & Family Ministry and School Chaplain*

on

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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Go in Peace, to Love and Serve the Lord

There's something about walking in Central Park in the summer, reading the names commissioned, and memories recalled on the park bench plaques, hearing the snippets of conversation in languages from around the world, the taste of iced tea at the Boathouse, the smell of blossoms in full bloom, and happy sights of squirrels scurrying across the path and dogs, even my own, basking in the sun. Over the last two months there has been a sea of smiles for the camera, from groups of graduates, celebrating what has been, what they have achieved, and what is to come. Indeed, all year-round New York City's backyard, is filled with people celebrating life's milestone moments, as they pose for just one more photo, which at the press of a button can be instantly 'sent' and shared around the world bearing good news, and conveying a message which says I love you, I miss you, and I wish you were here with me, all rolled into one.

Today's gospel is about sending or bearing a different type of good news, not simply a forwarding an impromptu loving text message that is 'done and dusted' as soon as it has been delivered. Rather it is a sending which signifies a response, a courageous response to a call from God that may lead to a life that is both exhilarating and challenging, painful and joyful, all rolled into one.

I wonder what the great crowd of 70, were feeling in this pivotal moment in their life of being sent, by Jesus? Perhaps they were filled with high emotions like those young graduates about to embark into the world, where anxiety and excitement fuse as they transition to a new phase of life, and step over a threshold into something unknown.

This crowd of 70 Mission Graduates, however were not sent bearing acclaimed degrees, elaborate hoods or gowns, but were instructed to carry nothing. Just like Peter and Paul who we remembered on their Feast Day last Wednesday, the 70 we are not qualified with bespoke resumes, rather they demonstrated what David Brooks, a columnist for the New York Times once called eulogy qualities, qualities that lead to a life well lived, such as compassion, humility, wisdom, courage, and integrity. In other words, the lives of the 70 demonstrated inner values that were and still are needed to Follow Jesus, values that emulate the spiritual fruits that we only heard about in our Epistle reading last week, and our Sunday School joyfully sings, the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. And so, like the apostles, whose very name rooted in Greek means 'sent one', they were to take the path of obedience and faith, to both teach and heal, to be and bring the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God was, and is indeed at hand.

The 70, our mission graduates were prepared for the task in hand and also given a clear and long list of instructions about *what to do or not to do* and *how to be and not to be*, including to take basically nothing on the understanding that God would provide for their needs as they trust in his leading,

1. Time is clearly of the essence, because the work again is too urgent for any delay. It was to be their 'Number 1' priority. They must also not waste their time assessing if the food set before them had gone through the proper process of purification, or waste time on the road with long-winded greetings that were part of the customs of the day.
2. On entering a house, they were instructed to use the customary greeting, "Peace be with you." And as they preached the Gospel this greeting would have a far greater meaning for those who accepted the message would too share in the peace of Christ.
3. They were to be prayerful, courageous and determined knowing full well that they would at times be treated like defenseless lambs among wolves; for to be on a mission can be dangerous for all concerned, as we have seen tolled out in the chronicles of history.

You only have to watch the British Film, *The Mission* (1986) to discover the joyful and challenging experiences of a [Jesuit](#) missionary in 18th-century South America, and to see how God's love was shared amidst scenes of devastating violence that aimed to eradicate whole communities. Sadly, there is also still a way to go in acknowledging, the high levels of toxicity, hurt and harm that the institutional church has caused over the decades, and in Christ's name.

In contrast to hierarchical and even stereotypical models of faraway missions, some of you will be familiar with *Christianity Rediscovered*, by Vincent Donovan (1978) who shared how his experiences in East Africa led to a total reappraisal of the meaning of his faith. Donovan's work continues to represent a provocative challenge to all those engaged in issues of evangelism, multiculturalism and mission. Mission that is solely focused on conversion or rescue of another, misses the point. Rather mission requires nurturing relationships that are based on listening and living, not for but alongside others, carrying one another's burdens and being prepared to be unexpectedly carried by others along the way. Mission isn't only concerned with those who move away for by virtue of our baptism we are all called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and live a life committed to peace, love and service, whether we are sent aboard or to our own back yard.

There have been multiple reflections on this commissioning or sending Gospel passage over the years, about what we are called to do and be, in summary:

Being sent involves a call to a simplicity of life, some might see this as a kind of Christian minimalism or detachment from material things that complicate or distract us; and a need to let go of or shake off the dust in our lives and setting aside those things we cling to or habits we depend upon over and above our dependence on God or distract us from God would have us be, including whether we leave or stay.

Being sent often involves living with faith and unknowing, I'm sure we have all had times when we simply wish God would speak louder and make the what and where of his calling known, even when in faith we pray *Here I am send me*.

Being sent involves being a bearer of Christ's presence and peace in the world, not in a flippant, wishful thinking but sincere, loving way.

Being sent can too, bring great joy, and also make us vulnerable, especially in times of uncertainty and tension when putting our trust in God may in itself feel risky.

A professor in Special Education, Dr. Felice Leonardo Buscaglia, once wrote about risk saying, *To laugh is to risk appearing the fool. To weep is to risk appearing sentimental. To reach out to another is to risk involvement. To expose feelings is to risk exposing our true self. To place your ideas and your dreams before the crowd is to risk loss. To love is to risk not being loved in return. To live is to risk dying. To hope is to risk despair. To try at all is to risk failure. But to risk we must, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.*

I wonder though, might our accepting and sharing Jesus' message of Good News be a risk worth taking? A message that says I love you, I miss you, I wish you were here with me, all rolled into one.

However, at the end of the day, **being sent** is not really an option if we are to be truly faithful followers of Jesus in the way we were reminded by Fr. Schultz last week.

As we pray for the newly baptized, **Send** *them* into the world in witness to your love, we too, in the words of the Dismissal, at the end of mass today, will be commissioned, sent out to, *Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord.*

How will we respond this week?

Thanks be to God. AMEN.