

**TIME AFTER PENTECOST – Lectionary 14 (Proper 9) (C-RCL)
July 7, 2019**

**Isaiah 66:10-14; Psalm 66:1-8; Galatians 6:[1-6]7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
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Ecumenical Prayer Cycle: Eritrea, Ethiopia**

I try. I really do. But I am *not* good at traveling light! I can think of a couple of experiences, however, that might have been telling me to do just that. Example Number 1: Way back when I was in college, at the end of one spring choir tour, when we were all gathered for a festive meal, I was given a miniature pink plastic suitcase. I had received the “missing suitcase” award! For some reason that tour, *my* suitcase was the one left behind or put on the wrong bus or otherwise gone missing! Example Number 2: In April of 2002, while on my sabbatical, I spent a wonderful week on the island of Iona – Iona is a tiny island in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland, that became an early center of Celtic Christianity in the 6th century. Leaving Iona via ferry, I arrived at the island of Mull – only to discover (as I saw others wheeling *their* luggage off the ferry) that I had left *my* luggage at the jetty back on Iona! True, I have a reputation of being the “Mom” of the group – the one with bandages and tissues and cough drops and whatever else someone in my traveling party might need from my stocked-for-everything luggage. But were these two incidents subtle messages for me to travel lighter?

Travel writer and TV host, Rick Steves, who happens to be a Lutheran, gives the following travel advice: “Go casual, simple, and very light. Remember, in your travels you’ll meet two kinds of tourists — those who pack light and those who wish they had. Say it out loud: ‘PACK LIGHT PACK LIGHT PACK LIGHT.’” [<https://www.ricksteves.com/travel-tips/packing-light/packing-smart>, accessed 7.4.2019] In a *Living Lutheran* interview, Steves said that: “Faithful travel is packing light but bringing Jesus along.” [<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2016/06/im-lutheran-rick-steves/>, accessed 7.4.2019]

“Go on your way,” says Jesus in today’s Gospel. “Travel light: Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.” [Luke 10:3,4, NRSV] The mission is urgent. Don’t get weighed down by things; don’t be distracted on the road; don’t hunt around for the best places to stay. (The directive to “greet no one on the road” may seem strange – or even rude. Commentators have noted, though, that “salutations were ceremonious and time-consuming” and the urgent nature of the mission would justify neglecting these observances on the road. [S. MacLean Gilmour, Exegesis in *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, in *The Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes: Volume VIII – Luke, John*, p. 185]) Yes, the mission is urgent, for Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem – where betrayal and crucifixion await.

If I asked you to close your eyes and picture Jesus and his followers together, what would you see? Jesus amid the twelve? Jesus teaching and feeding 4000 or 5000 people? Perhaps – but as we heard in today’s Gospel, Jesus now has seventy followers gathered round – *seventy* followers that he trusts enough to send on ahead of him – to the places he would go and to do what he would do – healing the sick and announcing that God has come near.

[“Overview: Sent with the Seventy,” in “Sunday, July 7, 2019, Lectionary 14,”

SundaysandSeasons.com

<https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources>, accessed 7.1.2019]

Earlier (in chapter 9 of Luke) Jesus has sent out the 12 with authority over demons and disease. They were to take nothing for the journey – “no staff, nor bag, nor bread, no money – not even an extra tunic.” [Luke 9:3, NRSV] Upon their return, the 12 report to Jesus all they have done.

Now, Jesus sends out the seventy. Do note the communal nature of this missionary activity: The seventy are sent out not individually, but “*in pairs*”. [Luke 10:1] This would be especially encouraging, I think, since they are being sent out “like lambs into the midst of wolves”! [Luke 10:3]

But this paired mission work is not just to protect “the lambs”. As one commentator reminds us:

The work of preaching and teaching is not for the sake of the preacher’s enhanced standing in the community. It is not about any one church being superior to another because of its size or gain in numbers or its charismatic leader. The work of ingathering (or gospel spreading) is such a rich message, it needs more than one person (or even one church denomination), not only in obedience to the need for Jesus’ presence but in order to get the story right by imparting it with adequate complexity.

[Melinda Quivik, “Proper 9: July 4, 2004,” “Preaching Helps”, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Vol. 31, Nr. 3, p. 228]

UniLu by itself would not have the resources to support a family in sanctuary – but as part of the Sanctuary Coalition? Ah, yes, *then* this mission can work! No one person, no one student from Phillips Brooks House Association, could single-handedly operate the Y2Y Harvard Square shelter – not when 150 volunteers are needed each week! [<https://www.y2ynetwork.org/get-involved/>, accessed 7.1.2019]

Mission work, preaching, teaching – all of these are not a one-way street; they are not about one worker or pastor or teacher or boss lecturing over those lucky enough to be present. No, at their core, these important jobs/careers/callings are about service, about hospitality.

I saw a stranger yestreen;
I put food in the eating place,
drink in the drinking place,
music in the listening place,
and in the name of the Triune
he blessed myself and my house,

my cattle and my dear ones, and the lark said in her song
 often, often, often,
 goes the Christ in the stranger's guise,
 often, often, often,
 goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.

[<http://www.pcmorristown.org/filerequest/23163.pdf>, accessed 7.1.2019]

In this Celtic Rune of Hospitality, there is a mutual giving and receiving of hospitality. The host puts out not just food and drink but also *music* – (isn't that so wonderful!) – to set out not only the essentials for *physical* survival, but also to set out something of *beauty* for the wellbeing of the spirit? – The host provides, and the stranger receives. The provider of hospitality in return is given a blessing by the stranger.

The pairs of seventy are to extend a blessing as well – a blessing of peace. In fact, “Peace to this house!” are the first words the seventy are to say when they enter a house. This is a peace that anticipates the resurrection. In the last chapter of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus appears to the disciples after the resurrection. The first words Jesus says to *them* are, “Peace be with you.” [Luke 24:36]

Commentator Amy Oden notes that: “As we engage others, we must first be well-grounded in God’s peace, the peace that passes understanding. God’s shalom is more than being calm. It is confidence in God’s abiding presence so that we also share that presence with others. Engaging others means not treating them as objects upon which we act, but as sacred others with whom we are called to be fully and peacefully present.” [Amy G. Oden, “Commentary on Luke 10:1-11, 16-20,” Working Preacher, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4104, accessed 7.2.2019] Think of it as “peace-filled hospitality”.

Note that those whom Jesus sends out in mission in today’s Gospel are not only to offer words of peace, but also to *receive*. And they are to be

gracious recipients of the hospitality offered, remaining in the same house, eating and drinking whatever is provided, not worrying about dietary restrictions.

In her commentary on today's Gospel text, Marilyn Salmon shared this story:

Several years ago, I asked seminary students to envision themselves as one of the seventy and imagine what would be most challenging about this journey. Many responses were predictable: not taking any money even for emergencies, no change of clothes, no food, depending on strangers for food and lodging, not being able to choose one's traveling partner, judging people who did not accept the message. But one student who had not spoken in class previously said, "Eat what is set before you." (verse 8) Silence, then a bit of nervous laughter followed. He repeated, emphatically, "Eat what is set before you," conveying by his tone that he was serious.

When I invited him to elaborate, he told us that his father had been a pastor in a rural, very poor area in South Dakota. The family was often invited for dinner by parishioners, most of them farmers. He recalled that he and his siblings were admonished to eat whatever was served. I supposed that he referred to a child's finicky tastes or disdain for green vegetables. But he went on to say that people on remote farms often relied on whatever they could kill or catch nearby for food, even for company. He added, "We just never knew what we would have to eat."

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=624, accessed 7.1.2019]

Note that those whom Jesus sends are not only to *receive* these gifts of hospitality – but they also are also to *give*, and to give peacefully. In those places where they receive a welcome, they are first to cure the sick who are there, and then they are to share the news that the dominion of God has come near. The seventy are sent out by Jesus both with acts of grace and words of comfort.

When I and other pilgrims arrived at Iona that April, the staff of the Iona Community welcomed us at the jetty, providing carts for our luggage.

What I came to really appreciate, though, was the notion of hospitality surrounding *leaving*. Do you remember my luggage left sitting at the jetty? Well, after all the passengers disembarked on the island of Mull, the ferry operator turned around, made an extra, unscheduled trip to Iona to retrieve my suitcases, and returned to Mull.

Everything works like clockwork there. When the ferry arrived at Mull the first time, two coaches were waiting to take the passengers across the island where they would find another ferry waiting, ready to take them to the mainland of Scotland. One of these buses was sent on ahead; the other was held to wait for the ferry with my luggage. I'm happy to report that both buses made it on time to catch the second ferry. A postscript: Some years later, John Bell from the Iona Community was a guest at UniLu. When I told him about this experience, he was genuinely surprised, exclaiming that he'd never heard of a ferry operator making an extra trip like that before! But here was an example of how peace-filled hospitality was extended to me – both in my coming and in my leaving – so that I could best continue my own mission during my sabbatical. For in life we are both host and guest.

What about here at UniLu? What are some examples of hospitality both in our welcoming and in our leaving? Several examples come to *my* mind: We have greeters in the narthex on Sunday morning. We have a liturgy for Farewell and Godspeed, which we used just a few weeks ago with Kevin and Megan. Ana, Erika, and Brianna have been welcomed as guests in sanctuary. Whitney Barth sent quilts to confirmands after they had left to go out into the world. (The quilts were a true physical reminder of provision, of peace, and of service). New Church Council officers are installed after their elections. The *Inkspot* keeps in the loop those who have physically left, so they can continue to be part of UniLu's mission in carrying out God's work. We

welcome the newly baptized with the words: “We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share”. [ELW, p. 231]

Let us remember that in all our work we are sent on Jesus’ mission, not our own. Many organizations – including congregations – work on “mission statements”. But the question to be asked should not only be, “What is *our* mission?”, but, “What is *Christ’s* mission?”, and, “How is Christ nurturing us and empowering us to participate in peace-filled hospitality as part of that larger mission?”

This mission is one for which and in which we will not necessarily be successful. Even the seventy faced the possibility that the message they brought would be rejected. We are, however, called to be faithful to that mission – and that message.

But let us also remember that on this mission for peace-filled hospitality we journey *together* – and not only now with each other – but with all the faithful of past and present. Although there will be times we carry our own loads on this mission, Paul calls us in Galatians to bear one another’s burdens. [Galatians 6:2, 5] — Perhaps that’s one reason to travel light – so that we’re free to carry others’ loads.

And, perhaps, part of this mutual encouragement can be toward traveling more lightly – not just literally – but spiritually, as well. What are distractions that get in the way of your carrying out God’s work? What are ways you measure success only in quantifiable figures? How can we encourage each other in our efforts toward better service, and toward stronger and more peace-filled hospitality in our mission endeavors, our preaching, our teaching, our Monday-through-Saturday work in the world? How might we accompany others on their journeys?

Christ sends us out – bearing words of peace and reconciliation, bringing acts of healing and restoration. So:

+ “Go on your way,” says Jesus. As you “bear one another’s burdens”, remember that you are not sent into mission alone, but you share the journey with members of this community of faith.

+ “Go on your way”. Travel light, but carry with you God’s promise (found in the words from Isaiah): “As a mother comforts her child, / so I will comfort you.”

+ “Go on your way”. Pay attention to opportunities to extend hospitality in your welcoming and leave-taking, seeing “Christ in the stranger’s guise.” And be gracious recipients of such hospitality as well.

+ “Go on your way.” Experience in your service journey the nearness of the presence of God. And “rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”
[Luke 10:20b, NRSV]

+ “Go on your way.” – Yes, but first, let us be open to receiving God’s gracious, glorious acts of peace-filled hospitality, singing with the Psalmist, “[H]ow awesome are God’s deeds toward all people”! [Psalm 66:5b] The invitation is extended: to gather round the table, joyfully, unhesitatingly, eating and drinking what is set before us [Luke 10:7] – for the dominion of God has come near.

And let the people say, “AMEN.”