

July 3, 2022
4th Sunday of Kingdomtide
“Vision”

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. ² He said to them, “The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. ³ Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves. ⁴ Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don’t even greet anyone along the way. ⁵ Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘May peace be on this house.’ ⁶ If anyone there shares God’s peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. ⁷ Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don’t move from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘God’s kingdom has come upon you.’ ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a city and the people don’t welcome you, go out into the streets and say, ¹¹ ‘As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God’s kingdom has come to you.’

¹⁶ Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. Whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned joyously, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit themselves to us in your name.”

¹⁸ Jesus replied, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. ¹⁹ Look, I have given you authority to crush snakes and scorpions underfoot. I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, don’t rejoice because the spirits submit to you. Rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.”

May God add a blessing to this reading from God’s holy word. Amen.

God’s kingdom has come near to you.

Rejoice, that your names are written in heaven.

What does it mean to be the church? What does it look like?

I thought I’d start off easy, for my first Sunday,

Whatever image you have of what it means to be the church, what church looks like, it is always something that we do and are in relationship – something we do together.

So as we continue this beginning of what comes next;

Will you pray with me?

God of relationship, of Trinity, of loving and Beloved community, I thank you for your call in the lives of the people of this congregation and their response to it. Entice us, Lord; woo us, capture our hearts, and give us a vision of what can be, what *must* be, what will be, as we live into the promise of heaven in the here and now. With the power of love and the authority to declare grace, keep us humble and compassionate, dependent on you, O God, and on your Spirit that we meet in the stranger who welcomes us. Help us to always rejoice less in our own victories than in the amazing grace that names us and claims us and makes us one family with you and with each other.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In 2003, I was six weeks away from completing a 32-week Bible study called Disciple.

And I had been invited on a three-day Men's retreat, my first "retreat" since being a youth.

And because of the questions and the reading and the praying in the Bible study I was discerning a call to ministry, or rather, I was waking up to the fact that God had been calling me for about twenty years.

And I was fired up about what God had done in Jesus, and how Jesus was calling us to live, and overwhelmed by the ways that the Holy Spirit guides and empowers that, but I was also a bit cynical about the institution, to be fair, about institutions in general.

And although I had met some nice people, and sang some lovely songs, and done a couple projects, I was longing for a glimpse of something more; a vision of what the church could be.

Truth is, there's a distance between Midwest nice, and the Body of Christ.

So, I'm on this 3-day retreat, maybe you've heard of it, called the Walk to Emmaus.

72 hours walking with Jesus, a crash course in Christian discipleship and applied servant leadership; for many folks it's a mountaintop experience.

For me, it was a vision, at once ordinary and supernatural.

A group of humans, focused on God, giving of themselves, open to the Holy Spirit, serving, building each other up, surrounded by prayer, honest, vulnerable, compassionate, able to say hard things and to hear them, knowing that the love of Jesus was embodied around them, declaring grace.

I saw healing, I saw transforming moments of confession and forgiveness, ... and I heard testimony about how, out of those experiences of grace and the knowledge of God's love in Jesus, the church was actually doing things that made the world look, even if only for a moment, more like the world that God wills.

72 hours, and a vision of the kingdom breaking in.

Vision of the kingdom in Luke 10:

The unknown 72 – disciples.

Their names aren't written here.

Sent out, not alone, but in teams.

To prepare the way, they go ahead of Jesus; why?

The appetizer, the preview of the presence of God embodied, the love of God in fullness among us.

And what does THAT look like?

Healing.

Freedom from oppression.

Because tomorrow is Independence Day, it's worth noting that declaring that "God's kingdom has come upon you" is a revolutionary act for people in the Roman Empire.

It is simultaneously a declaration of independence from the kingdom of Caesar, and a confession of dependence on the true and right and good ruler of all nations, even all Creation.

And when God rules, demonic forces are cast out, overthrown, defeated and crushed.

All those things that are obstacles to human thriving, the things that possess us, our fears, jealousies, and hatreds.

The things that separate us, from God's love, from communities of mutuality, and even from ourselves.

And the kingdom doesn't force its way it, it shows up as an offering, in vulnerability.

It risks being despised, and rejected, it doesn't demand that those it comes to be holy first, it only asks them to be open.

It's worth noting a couple of things.

First, all of these folks being sent are almost certainly Jewish, aware of, and trying to keep the dietary laws of Torah.

Jesus says, eat what they put in front of you, whether you know it's kosher or not.

Think about the vulnerability and trust that requires.

Second, Jesus tells them to shake the dust off when they're not welcome. He says that a rejection of them is a rejection of him is a rejection of God.

He doesn't say that he won't still come to that place.

Not even crucifixion can keep Jesus from offering himself, from reconciling even the unrepentant; "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

But we declare, the kingdom of God has come to you.

What does it mean to be the church?

It means to be called.

Called to follow Jesus, to be under the discipline of his way of being in the world, his way of relating, to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin.

It means to have a mission.

Called to accept the freedom and power God gives you for the mission of resisting evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

It means that you're part of a covenant.

Called to confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church

which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races.

We do this together.

Our vision of what it means to be the church is a vision of a world in right relationship.

Where the hungry are fed.

The sick are healed.

The oppressed are liberated.

The separated are reconciled.

It's a world of healing and wholeness, where all humans can thrive, where all Creation rejoices in the source of the love and justice and mercy that beings all of this into being and participates in multiplying the fruit of that grace in praise and thanksgiving to the glory of our Creator and Savior.

Because at the root of all of this, at the foundation of this vision is the God who made things good and beautiful, who intends goodness, and justice, who chose solidarity, and endured suffering, so that we would know the true reach of love, the joy that all our names are written in heaven.

And because of that, when we show up in faith, the kingdom of God has come near.

That's my vision of the church, anyway.

What vision has God given you of the world that God intends and where has Christ sent you?

Rejoice, not because the spirits submit to you, but because your names are written in heaven.
Amen.