

## PEOPLE OF PEACE

March 22, 2020

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### **Luke 10:1-11**

*After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*

*3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.*

*7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*

*10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I'm not sure I recognized just how relevant this passage would be when back in December I chose it for our March 22 service of worship.

Verse 4: "Greet no one on the road."

Verse 7: "Remain in the same house."

Verse 9: "cure the sick..."

I'm also quite sure I could not have foreseen just how difficult a passage this might be because this is a passage all about going out and being with strangers in their homes.

And yet we Presbyterians believe Scripture is God's word to us and the Holy Spirit faithfully speaks through this word...so let us listen. But first, let us invite the Holy Spirit to open our ears.

Gracious God, give us ears to hear your voice in and through this, your Word. In Christ's name we pray.  
Amen.

Growing up I loved playing baseball. And I especially loved playing the home games. Games that were played on the same field where we practiced all week. Games played on the same field where I had practiced and played for years actually.

I was a first baseman, and so I received a lot of throws from the second baseman and the shortstop and the third basemen - and at that middle school age our arms were not always reliably strong. They would throw the ball to me and oftentimes it would bounce in the dirt before reaching me. Not the ideal kind of throw to have to catch...but, on our home field I was used to the dirt.

I knew how our dirt was a soft kind of dirt where the ball would just die once it hit that ground. I knew I could scoop their poor throw up by keeping my glove pretty low to the ground. I loved the home games.

Oppositely, I did not care nearly as much for away games, especially on a couple fields where the dirt on their infield was typically brittle and dry and had rocks.

It was on one of these fields many years ago in the month of March that I was trying to field a throw from our third baseman. The ball did not make it all the way to me, and so the ball hit onto that unfamiliar dirt, and it hit one of those rocks I was not used to dealing with, and so the ball bounced with incredible speed at an awkwardly high angle straight up into my nose. I was knocked me flat on the ground.

I no longer recall if my nose technically broke or it was very painful, swollen reality the next few days...what I know is that moment made it clear once more: I have always preferred the predictability and comfort of home field advantage.

For me, then, the single most difficult part of Jesus's words to his disciples in this passage from Luke 10 is that he is quite explicitly taking away home field advantage from his own followers.

First, Jesus tells them they can't have their familiar provisions on hand when they are sent out.

"Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals..." None of your normal basics and no back-up plans either.

Then Jesus explains that he is sending his disciples empty-handed into the homes of strangers where these disciples have no idea how they will be received.

And even if they are well-received, Jesus instructs the disciples to eat and drink whatever the host serves. (Eating is mentioned twice in our short passage because Jesus knows they are Jews being sent among Gentiles where what is acceptable to eat is at times scandalously different.)

Bottom line: The disciples have absolutely no home field advantage. No familiar provisions or familiar back up plans, none of the familiarity of their own homes and worship space, none of the familiarity of their own food and drink and household rhythms.

It is entirely unfamiliar terrain upon which they are to navigate.

In a mere 10 days, it still astounds me how much of what we considered quite familiar and reliable in our world has so significantly shifted - or at least put on an indefinite hold.

To be sure, we did not look to give up any of our familiar rhythms and ways as Jesus is instructing his disciples to do for this mission. And Jesus has not suddenly taken all the familiarity from us so that we might be on unfamiliar terrain like these disciples in our passage. Not at all.

And yet the truth remains, circumstances now what they are: here we are, disciples of Jesus, suddenly standing on very unfamiliar terrain.

Routine ground balls like getting a haircut, playing a sport, paying a bill, teaching children, accomplishing work, going to a restaurant...they bounce a whole lot differently and unpredictably - or they've just ceased altogether.

The routine of how we do church together - how we study Scripture, how we worship, how we fellowship - this is all new terrain.

In fact, I think a good deal of the anxiety and the fear we know today is not only from the prospect of getting the novel coronavirus, it is also from the fact that the very social and economic and societal ground beneath us has shifted so significantly that even though we are all in our own homes, this does not feel like a home game.

In fact, it can be terrifying to stand on such terrain.

And I think some our experience in these recent days makes us rightly wonder:

Why in the world would Jesus ever proactively want to call his disciples into vulnerable, unfamiliar terrain as he does in Luke 10?

We get that those situations can happen to people as it is happening to us right now, but what kind of God calls followers to willingly give up home field advantage?

Jesus, what is it about the rocky, unfamiliar terrain that you find to be so promising as soil for your work?

My freshman year of high school I played trumpet in the marching band, and that year we were invited to play in the parade at Disney World. Nearly every day for two consecutive months we would go outside to the school's running track, march around and around that track, and over and over again that whole time we would play a song called "The Spanish Armada."

We were, of course, rehearsing for a parade during which we would march for a good mile and play that one song over and over. By the end of those two months, I knew that song backwards and forward, I knew every crack and crevice in our school's old running track. I was deeply familiar with performing at home.

But then we arrive to Disney World, we get ready to line up for the parade itself - and you better believe the terrain was quite different. The main Disney thoroughfare upon which we were to march, it is certainly beautiful and clean, but it also has train tracks crossing it at various places, and a little bit of a curvature to the surface of the road.

As well, the sun is far more intense in Florida than Ohio where we had been rehearsing. The crowds - goodness - the crowds - so loud and excited to cheer on everyone in the parade.

All to say, not home field. Not familiar.

And two things can happen at this moment:

1) fear can overwhelm us or paralyze us; our breath constricts and the music gets much smaller.

Or...

2) as my band director told us in the moments before we began the parade: "Focus on the fundamentals. Roll your feet. Listen for the beat. Play the one song you know by heart."

One of the great gifts of unfamiliar terrain - if it does not paralyze us - is that it invites a laser-like focus and dependence on the fundamentals.

We see Jesus inviting this same focus and dependence on the fundamentals in our passage this morning when he tells his disciples to show up among strangers and announce, "Peace to this house."

Because that really is the most fundamental gift the church has to give.

Think about it...

When Jesus rose from the depth of the grave, Jesus's very first words to his disciples are this, his very first gift:

"Peace be with you."

"My peace I give you," he says another time.

"Shalom" is the Hebrew word there for "peace," and it means well-being and wholeness in every facet of life.

"Well-being and wholeness in mind, body, heart, and soul, I breath upon you as my first gift."

And actually Jesus say this first word to his followers right after rising from the grave to make it clear just how powerful this word of blessing is.

"My stronger-than-death Shalom be upon you - now and forevermore."

"Peace be upon you" is our most fundamental baptismal grace.

It is the promise of Jesus's life and forgiveness and love that cannot fade, change, or go away.

And we not only have that shalom as our most fundamental gift, we were made to let our lives announce that shalom as our most fundamental call - to let the peace of Jesus pour forth in the ways we serve the mind, body, heart, and soul of others.

And truth be told sometimes it is not until we find ourselves empty-handed and standing on deeply unfamiliar terrain that we can hear more clearly that singular voice calling, "Just focus fundamentals. Play the song you not only know by heart but is written upon your heart. Let your life announce the peace of Jesus you've been given."

And indeed in these recent days I think the church has been focusing afresh on this fundamental gift of peace.

Because even as churches throughout this nation no longer have as much use of their building, even as they no longer gather for study or prayer or worship in all of the familiar ways...

How many have we seen raise their hands and say, "How can I serve? How can my life offer well-being and wholeness unto another - their body, their mind, their heart, their soul?"

How many have we seen share Scriptures online, offer prayer over the phone, send hand-written letters of comfort?

How many have we seen offering shalom all the more fully and fervently precisely when the terrain is deeply unfamiliar?

Look, we all love playing at the home field, we all prefer marching upon familiar track. It's more predictable, it's easier. And we rightly ache and pray that we might eventually arrive at a just and good stability in our society.

At the same time, when you don't have home field advantage, you're forced to focus afresh and depend afresh upon the fundamentals - and that can be such a profound gift when your fundamental is the very Shalom of the living God.

How has God been calling you back to a focus on this most basic, central and eternal gift amid all the profound uncertainty?

How has God invited you to share that same gift in these recent days?

How is God calling you to let your life announce the peace of Jesus in the coming days?

And sure, Jesus is realistic in our passage some people you encounter will not care for the peace or receive the peace. You can't control that. But let's not forget how Jesus frames this whole passage.

His very first words in this passage are this: "The harvest is plentiful..."

It is Jesus's way of having the disciples look out upon the horizon of this world and see that right this very moment upon this unfamiliar brittle soil - right there, God is growing an abundance.

"If you will but march forward upon this terrain with far less in your hands than you are used to...if you will but keep moving and simply seek to announce the most fundamental gift you have, I promise you, the harvest is abundant." Do we believe it?

I will tell you, we heeded our director's instruction, and we marched that unfamiliar Floridian mile with an intense focus and dependence upon the fundamentals...and it was easily the best we had ever marched and fullest we had ever played.

It is my prayer that fear does not constrict our breath and make the music grow small. It is my pray that this season of all seasons would be the one where the peace of Christ plays forth in our lives and through our lives with a uniquely rich fullness and clarity and beauty.

I'm convinced we just need that one song played faithfully, over and over. Amen.