

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In last Sunday's gospel reading from St. Luke, we heard about Jesus and his disciples traveling toward Jerusalem while passing through a Samaritan village, and how that turned out. We now know the history of the extreme animosity between Jews and Samaritans, so it seemed predictable that the Samaritans refuse to show hospitality to Jesus and his followers....causing James and John, to suggest an immediate crushing response: "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and wipe them out?".

Our common, natural reaction to rejection, hostility, criticism...is to get our backs up and go on the counter-attack. We hunker down and close ranks with other birds of a feather, flocking together.

Cycle and cycle and cycle around in waves of reactivity...proudly proclaiming our outrage over the ignorance or hard-heartedness of the others who do not agree with us. "Being right" instead of being understood.

This is the third passage in the last four weeks that invites us to step out of the reactivity that the world around us reinforces. Jesus, instead, offers the consistent promise of peace and the nearness of God's kingdom, or God's kin-dom, within clear commands from Jesus to his followers about how to respond, not react, as they engage the world they live in by offering two clear proclamations.

This story of sending of the 70 gives a rare window into what it looked like to follow Jesus in the first generation. In verses 5-6, Jesus sends out disciples with the first proclamation that sounds deceptively simple: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'".

This word of peace is the first word. The opening word. The announcing word. Notice that Jesus does not tell them to do any sort of assessment before making this proclamation. He does not ask them to determine whether this house follows the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or whether this house has kept the law, or whether this house is likely to receive the good news Jesus brings. Jesus does not ask them to do a risk assessment or pre-judge...just like he does not ask us to pre-qualify based on choice of political party, our herding tendencies on Facebook, or the bumper sticker on our cars.

You and I are living in the end times of the global, institutional church as the greatest organizational machine of man's own making. The end of (quote) religion (unquote) as a global power, in and of itself. And, as a result, and in my opinion, we are just now beginning to see the rebirth of the

originally intended, intensely personal spirituality of a loving relationship of the first century church...all around the concept of “God’s peace”.

Issues that have dominated the church’s teaching, doctrine and practice for 2,000 years have been exposed as arguments with a singular proposition: that God is somehow violent. That is the single presupposition of idolatry: that God is violent. If so, what is the Good News? The Good News preached and exemplified by Jesus Christ was the radical revelation that the Creator of heaven and earth was and is non-violent and non-retaliatory. The real source of the power of the gospel is the revelation of pure Love and what being fully, truly human will be all about. And, if we commit ourselves to a committed understanding of the relationship of the Trinity, we cannot divide the Father from the Son....so, to us, the non-violent, forgiving Son is the face of God the Father, the Creator.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are now starting to be thrust into the spotlight in a fresh and radical way, and the church, in my opinion, is finally able to become what Jesus intended, over time in slowly becoming free of its slavery and bondage to being a dominant force in the ways of the world.

Second, Jesus goes on to instruct them in the dynamic of sharing peace: at verse 6, “if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you”.

What is this? These verses are packed with instruction for today’s saturated culture and world of everyone being reactive/dismissive/argumentative to everybody and everything else, so it is worth taking the time to unpack.

First, Jesus assumes that these apostles he sends, do in fact have peace.

Jesus says “Your peace” specifically...not just random, generic peace...will rest on others or return to you. So, as we engage others...central to this diocese’s direction in the Learning Communities Initiative...we must first be well-grounded in God’s peace. The peace that passes all understanding. Again, what is this?

God’s peace, or shalom, is more than being calm. God’s peace is a gift. A blessing. Again, we do not understand it, and really have difficulty defining it or even describing it, but it is central and seminal to who we are called to be. God’s peace is a transformational gift from God. What do I mean by that, and how does it happen...even if neither I or anyone else can put a hard finger on it?

It is beyond our understanding...the peace that passes all understanding, is the phrase you hear every Sunday...because we do not control it, create it, fabricate it, quantify it...yet, still, it happens. It happens when we follow the lead of Jesus and pray to God: Please help me. Help me to trust in you. Help me be the kind of person you want me to be.

That is all. In being patient over time...repeating those prayers in heartfelt moments...we will hopefully begin to feel, or acknowledge, or recognize, a transformation. A transformation of being turned, shifted in direction..away from what the world considers to be important or vital or necessary, and into a world-view of living...eternally. Eternal life. Becoming gradually and gradually more and more free from the drama, and stress, and pressure of trying to control ourselves and the world around us. Living holistically....in the company and protection of God.

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. If they do not share this peace, Jesus does not advise us to reactivity, scorn or conflict. Instead, he reassures his followers that their peace is not diminished and cannot be taken away from them: "it will return to you".

Jesus also instructs them in a second proclamation: "The kingdom of God has come near to you" at verse 9. Remarkably, this proclamation applies whether one is welcomed (as at verse 8) or one is not welcomed (as at verse 10). The kin-dom of God is promised to all, to those who receive as well as to those who reject. The new kinship, a new way of understanding all human relationships, which is God's ordering of all things, is a life-changing proclamation.

Here again, Jesus does not instruct them to argue, convince, or threaten if they are not welcomed. He does advise them to signal their moving on by shaking dust off their shoes (verse 11). In this way, they are not weighed down by rejection, or paralyzed with trying to figure out what they did wrong or could have done differently to produce a different outcome. Instead, Jesus invites them to move forward in the confidence of these two proclamations, "Peace to this house!" and "The kingdom of God has come near."

As Christians, we can reliably root our lives in these two proclamations -- "Peace to this house!" and "The kingdom of God has come near." This is the good news that we have to share, rather than turning it to blaming, accusing or judgmental analyzing, symptoms that reactivity holds our lives in bondage.

Notice how Jesus only tells them what they should do, and he does not say anything about measuring their success. If it does not work, shake their dust off your feet and move on. But in our congregations, it is difficult to avoid measuring success. We live with membership figures, giving levels, budgets, annual reports, and so on. It is very easy to measure our work by these figures, and that

is how many people will measure our ministry, but that is contrary to this text.

Why did Jesus only tell them what to do? And why, on their return, did he tell them not to rejoice in that the spirits submitted to them, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven?

Because it is all about God...and not about us.

The ministry and the message we bring is the ministry and message Jesus was doing. What we do and say is about him and from him. Did you note the surprise in the report the seventy bring back to Jesus? Is not that because they did not know or expect what would happen?

How do we continue the ministry of Jesus in proclaiming that the “Kingdom of God has come near you?” Maybe we need to look at it in more subtle, less dramatic ways, and find God’s encouragement in it.

It is ALWAYS, always, always, about the multiple times, each and every day, that God puts us into position to have contact or interaction with someone else. And what do we do with that?

How often can we....how often do we?

The kingdom of God has come near you. That is the message we are called to share, by word and deed...all in the name of the God revealed to us in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.