

Sermon on Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
7th Sunday after Pentecost, July 3, 2016
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
By James Erlandson

“Road Trip!”

When we were younger, a lot younger, we would always get excited when mom and dad packed up the station wagon and said that we were going on a “road trip!” We would pack up the sleeping bags and a tent in the back, and off we would go up north, or out west - never south, and never east – “go west” was always the popular direction for Americans “back in the day. When my high school buddies and I took the trip of a lifetime one summer after graduation, we, of course, went west – to the Black Hills, Yellowstone, the Tetons and Wind River mountains of Wyoming. “Let’s take a road trip” can still be a welcome invitation.

So I was scrolling on Facebook last week, and I came upon a delightful photo of a road winding through rolling, wooded foothills of Montana. There was only one problem: at the top of the hill, the road was washed out. One could see the road continuing in the background, except that there was a great big gap in the road, with a deep crevasse where the road once had been. But next to the road was a yellow highway sign which read: “Just Speed Up A Bit. You Got This.” I guess it all depends on your faith – do you believe you could do it? Is your insurance paid up? How are your brakes? Then I began to sing, “May the road rise to meet you, may the sun be at your back....” Mostly because our friend Joann Conroy and family are in Ireland right now. But I digress.

Today in the gospel Jesus sent his disciples out on a “road trip” of sorts. Not just the twelve – Jesus appointed *seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.*” If those who followed Jesus when he invited them thought they were just going to go along with him and watch what he did, they were in for a surprise! He sent each of them out to do the same work that he did – proclaiming the good news of God, casting out demons and healing people from their diseases. They had no idea that they could do that – they might have thought, “I didn’t sign up for THIS!” Why did Jesus send them out ahead of him? Because *“the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”*

Now, when we go off on a road trip, whether its camping or a vacation, we take plenty of stuff along with us. We will pack our bags full with plenty of clothing, games, snacks, and credit cards to pay for food, hotel and refreshments along the way. I remember when we went camping, we would take sleeping bags,

tents, cooking utensils, pots and pans, food, a cooler with ice, all kinds of things to keep us going for a weekend or a week. When I went with my high school buddies, we brought freeze-dried food, backpacks, hiking boots, cameras, matches – we were loaded down with gear. If a military squadron goes out on patrol, they are loaded down with gear also – in Jesus’ day that would be helmets, spear, sword, shield, extra boots, tents, sleeping gear, and so on. Soldiers today will pack up to 80 pounds of gear into their backpacks to keep them in provisions for all circumstances.

But what did Jesus send the seventy out with? Jesus said, *“I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.”* This would require a great deal of trust on the part of those going out! You mean no money? No shoes? No suitcase filled with clothes? Not even an overnight bag and a toothbrush? What are we going to do?

Jesus did this to emphasize that they would need to rely on their faith in God and trust the one who sent them. They would have to rely on the generosity of their hosts, the people whom they visited that they did not know, to provide for them food, hospitality, shelter, clothing, and all they needed from day to day. They could not take anything along. “Live off the land” – not like soldiers, who took by force whatever they wanted - but to rely on the generosity and hospitality of those who received them. So Jesus said, *“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in the peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”*

This was a tall order, indeed. I remember way back in the early seventies, when I was in high school, and I took a trip to Chicago for a religious conference for teens. Busloads of us from the Twin Cities went to meet with high schoolers from other cities for a youth ministry conference where we sang, ate, had Bible studies, and listened to speakers. Then one day they sent us out. To talk to people and share our faith. Uh, oh. This wasn’t what I had signed up for. I was there with friends, to have fun and learn, not to share. I was still searching – I didn’t know anything. They sent us out into suburban neighborhoods, two by two. (I should have read the gospel lesson before I went on the trip!) So I picked a person that I thought was a real “Bible-banging Jesus freak” to pair up with, thinking that I could just go along. Wrong. When we arrived at the first house, we rang the door bell. An adult answered the door. What do we say? He asked, “Well, what do you want?” My partner stammered, “I-I-I-I-, buh-buh-buh- we want to t-t-t-tell you something about Je-Je-Je-“ I couldn’t take it anymore. I interrupted him by saying, “Hello, my name is Jim and this is my friend, Pete. We’re with a high

school student conference, and they asked us to go out and take a survey about how many people in this community go to church.” (I lied. That wasn’t the plan.) The man answered, “Oh, that’s nice. Good for you. Yes, I go to church, and you’re not going to talk me into going anywhere else!” I said “Thank you sir, have a nice day!” He closed the door, and my partner and I ran down the block to the Dairy Queen and ordered soft serve ice cream. Then we sat down and said to each other, “Well, that went well! When did they say there were picking us up?”

Things went a little better a dozen years later, when I was in seminary, serving my internship at Christ Lutheran on Capitol Hill. The congregation was comprised of a lot of immigrants and refugees, from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Somalia and other countries in Africa. The pastor and I did a lot of home visits to meet these new arrivals, and sit in their homes. I was always amazed at the hospitality we were shown by these families who didn’t have much. They always put out some fruit or something to drink when a visitor came to their home. I remember one time visiting a man from Ethiopia with Hanna Petros, the church’s Ethiopian worker. He had been ill, and wanted a pastoral visit. Hanna and I came to his home, and his wife offered us something to drink. We talked, with Hanna translating, and I was fascinated to meet this man from another continent and culture. We talked for over an hour, and then we said goodbye. I was so happy to have made a new “friend” from Ethiopia. When Hanna and I got into the car we talked about how well the visit had gone, and the new friendship we had made. But before we drove off Hanna said, “There’s only one thing. Why didn’t you pray with this man? He was waiting for a prayer, but was too polite to ask!” Well, I had been so engrossed in the conversation, that I had forgotten the real reason for my visit! Live and learn!

Well, the seventy whom Jesus sent out did a lot better than that. They had a little more training, more faith, and a lot more maturity than I had in 1971, or in 1984! When the seventy reported back to Jesus, they were all excited! Luke says that *“The seventy returned with joy, saying ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us! He said to them, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning!...Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’”* In other words, don’t rejoice that you do such great things in Jesus’ name, but only that you have been called and named by God in Christ Jesus, and saved by him from your sins.

So, what do we do with all this. We could use this as advice to live our lives of faith simply and humbly. Take only what you need on this journey of life; and have faith that God will provide for you. But we also see a correlation between the seventy whom Jesus sent out, and our numbers today. We may not have seventy here today at Redeemer on this holiday weekend, but seventy is our usual worship attendance. It is also the average number of worshipers in more than half the

churches in America. Maybe mega churches get the most publicity (good or bad) and attention, but smaller churches like ours are where the action is today! Maybe because it's the depth of relationship and community - which can be built with 70, rather than 7,000 – where you can't know everybody. I know, because I have served as a pastor in a church of 8500, of 2500, a few hundred and less.

I like how Karoline Lewis, preaching professor at Luther Seminary, says it's not "what" you have with you on the journey of life, but "who". Jesus gathered a close community of 12 disciples, and a larger extended community of 70 followers. When he sent the 70 out, two by two, they had one person close to them always, and they knew that they were part of an extended, connected community of 70 faithful followers of Jesus. This is what gave them the courage to actually go out and fulfill their commission, along with their faith in the one who sent them.

Today you and I are able to build community here because we are not "too large" as a church, and we can know one another like extended family if we wish. We also find, to our great surprise, great moments of joy when we are able to witness to the love of Jesus. Maybe we aren't casting out demons, or see Satan fall from heaven. But we do have many high points of love to celebrate! Last spring we hosted over 20 women, men and children in the emergency family shelter held here for 2 months through Project Home – who would have thought it was possible that we could provide such a safe place here? We have provided on our grounds a place for Hmong families to farm and grow vegetables for a second summer. We have celebrated the affirmation of baptism for four young men, we have hosted a benefit choir concert for young African American men this Pentecost Sunday and raised funds for Ujamaa Place, and we have blessed our Muslim neighbors with peace during the month of Ramadan. We can help move our city toward providing earned sick and safe time for all workers in St. Paul through our work with Isaiah. This past week our small number raised \$3000 to provide airplane tickets to reunify Obang Agwa with his wife and children from south Sudan in Africa at the end of this month! We rejoice with Obang the anticipated arrival of his family after four long years of red tape, and prepare for a truly joyful celebration! I don't know if we will see Satan fall from heaven, but I see God glorified through the love of our risen Lord Jesus Christ!

For Jesus has called us together as one people, and he has also called you and me to go out into this world with his Word of love, compassion and grace. It is not about "what" we have in possessions or in the beauty of this church, but it is "who" we have giving us life – God in Christ Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit – and the community of faith we have here in this place. As we consider how we will continue to bear witness in the future as Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, may we treasure the calling that we have received from God, to sit with each other

and with those in this community, individually, two by two or however it goes.
For the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few! Thanks be to God! Amen.