

Sermon on Luke 10:1-11, 16-20  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, July 7, 2019  
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer  
By James Erlandson

When I was a child, like many children, sometimes I was afraid of the dark. At night there are many things to be afraid of, when you cannot see clearly, most of them imaginary. I remember one night, when I was somewhere between five and eight years old, being afraid in the new house where we now lived in south Minneapolis. I was upstairs, alone in my room, and it seemed so dark and big. So I called out to my mother, who came to ask me what was wrong. I just wanted her to sit with me. Which she did, in a chair, with her hair full of bobbie pins. She wanted to go back to bed, but I insisted. As long as mother stayed with me, I was not afraid, because she was watching. Eventually I must have fallen asleep, because I woke up the next morning, and she wasn't there.

So we know what children need to feel safe – to know that a parent is there, and that God is also there watching over them. Maybe parents have us pray to God at bedtime so that they can get some sleep, teaching us that God is like a loving parent, keeping watch. It makes me think of all the children now separated from their parents, some left alone when their parents work, some forcibly removed by ICE or border agents on the southern border. We know how much safer children feel, no matter the situation, when one or both of their parents are with them. To be separated in times of loneliness and fear of the unknown can be so damaging to a child. It reinforces how wrong the family separation policy is that our government follows for families seeking asylum, and how our faith calls us to speak clearly to our representatives on behalf of these families who came to us for help, safety and a new life, that this is wrong.

It reminds me also of my wife Kim's experience as a refugee in 1979, when she fled the communists in Cambodia to Thailand. They faced many difficult and harrowing situations, from walking over bodies in minefields, to sleeping outside without shelter, being robbed by thieves along the way. But they were able to continue because they were together, all the sisters with their mother and father, and they had hope that they would cross over together to a safe place, and a new life together, in a new country. This is what ultimately brought them here. This is an experience and a story shared by millions of Americans, many who are citizens, and many who have not yet completed this path – who are still enroute, with much to fear, but continue to hope in the ultimate welcome and safety for their families.

But this sermon is not just about a child's fear of the dark, or the hopes and fears of refugees and immigrants to America. The gospel today is much bigger than that, and it includes all of us. Of the many lessons which can be learned from

today's gospel in Luke, the main point I hear from Jesus is that even though we ourselves have many anxieties and fears about what is to come, he assures us that God is with us, and God is so powerful and awesome that even the demons submit to him, and to those who follow in faith! Even when we are afraid, and think we are powerless against the forces that threaten peace in our world and disorder our daily lives, Jesus sends you and me out to declare *the peace of God*, and to proclaim that *the kingdom of God has come near!* An audacious claim to make when so much seems to be going wrong! Jesus believes that *the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few*. When the prevailing wisdom seems to promote the "myth of scarcity", that there is "not enough" for everyone, not enough to go around, and that "this country is full", the truth is that our Creator has provided great abundance in this world and in this land, enough for all of God's children. There is plenty of room for everybody, and we need MORE people, not fewer, to tell the world this truth and to share in God's abundance. Working together, we can all feed the world. The world's children do not have to be afraid at night about where they will sleep, what they will eat, and where their parents are. Because God has provided this world, with enough food, shelter, and hope for everyone.

So I'd like to take a moment to pose a question for you. What does it mean to you when you hear Jesus' words: "*The kingdom of God has come near to you?*" How do you translate this in your mind? Is it that God's presence is near? That God is working among you and me today, in the world and in your life, even when it may seem invisible? Is it that God is behind everything that happens – even when we don't understand it? Or is it that God is working even when evil happens, when sin occurs, when vulnerable people are harmed, when children are separated from their families and held in detention camps – but God is still working in spite of the evil, through us, to make something good happen? Or in your own life, when sickness or misfortune come, and you can't see your way out, but you have faith that God is there, somehow, to give you strength? Or maybe in the Church these days, when so many have seem to have given up on faith, and congregations are dwindling, does God still have work for the Church to do? What is God doing with us these days – does God have a plan, or are we left to our own devices? To say "the kingdom of God has come near" is to have faith that God is real, that God loves you and is working to bring good out of evil.

So it seems to me that the message of the scriptures today is that God is present no matter what our situation in life, working to bring peace and wholeness. To the exiles who returned from Babylon home to Jerusalem, who were disappointed that their hopes weren't fulfilled and life in Jerusalem was much harder than they had expected, Isaiah said: "*Rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy...As a mother comforts her child,*

*so I will comfort you....you shall see, and your heart shall rejoice...and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants.” (Isa. 66)*

To the disciples of Jesus, who went out two by two as ambassadors of Jesus to the towns and villages of Galilee and Judea, in fear and trepidation, carrying little with them but the clothes on their backs and the good news of God, Jesus sent them out with the message of peace to every household, and that God’s kingdom was very near. To a people living in poverty and fear, under the Roman Empire’s domination, this was truly good news!

Many people today are living in fear or loneliness, without direction or hope. It could be because of declining health, loss of a job or a relationship, the challenge of finding a safe place to live in the shortage of affordable housing, or it could be because they don’t have documents to keep them safe from deportation in America, even though their ancestors in America go back thousands of years. Many people of faith in congregations today are worshipping God while at the same time being anxious for the future of the Church. Where are the people, the families who once filled pews in churches like these even fifty years ago? Will our children and grandchildren have faith to see them through, as we have relied upon faith in our lives and challenges? Without faith, in what direction will this nation go?

Today I have good news for you! God is here, Jesus is with us, present in God’s Word of scripture, and in the meal we share at our Lord’s table in bread and wine. Jesus is also present in the community of faith with whom we have gathered. Jesus is here, with you, when you are lonely and isolated, even in a crowded city. Jesus is here with you when you feel lost, like a shepherd who goes out looking for a lost sheep and gathers the whole flock together again. Jesus is here when you feel helpless to change the political systems that keep people divided and powerless, that show such a lack of compassion for children and families and mistreat the most vulnerable people, which is so contrary to God’s call to us.

God is here, continuing to work with you and with all of us, calling you and me by faith to love God and neighbor as ourselves, to share God’s compassion for all God’s children. When it seems that there is such a need for a harvest of goodwill, and those willing to do the work of compassion are so few, Jesus finds us and calls us as disciples. In the gospels Jesus sent out 70 disciples two by two into towns and villages to declare peace in every home, that “the kingdom of God is near”. Today Jesus sends you and me out of this Sunday worship service into the world declaring peace in our homes, that God is at work in every home, community, city and town working for good in every person’s life. You are God’s ambassador, a disciple of Jesus and when you go out into that world you don’t have to bring a whole briefcase full of knowledge and magical tricks. All you need to bring is faith, and your experience of the peace of God in your life, and your story of how God is at work in what you have seen and heard. Thanks be to God!