

Sunday Sermon July 6, 2025

Last week's Gospel told us that Jesus had "set his face to go to Jerusalem." Aware of His impending suffering and death, today Jesus goes about preparing his followers to continue His mission. Today's Gospel gives us great insight into discipleship.

The first verse tells us that Jesus sent His disciples in pairs. Sent... in pairs... Ambassadors of Christ sent out to continue His work.

Disciples do not just sit at the Master's feet, listening, debating. Disciples are sent on a mission to continue the Master's work. For followers of Jesus, this would mean his work of teaching, feeding, healing, reconciling, loving.

We, similarly, do not come here to church simply to be filled, or comforted. We come to be shaped and formed in the Way of Love so that we might go forth to live it, so that love might grow and spread in our world.

Our Eucharistic prayer says it well: "we do not come to this table for solace only, but for strength, for pardon only, but for renewal. We do not come simply to feel better, but to be better Christians, patterning our lives more closely on Christ's, and going forth to proclaim and to live out His life-giving love.

I've said it before, and you'll hear me say it again: the most important prayer we pray is at the end of this service, after communion, when we stand together and ask God to "send us out to do the work that God has given us to do" – to love and to serve. Love and serve – that's our job. We disciples are sent to love and to serve.

The Gospel also tells us how Jesus sends his disciples in pairs, companions on the journey, we are not alone in this work. We're built for relationships, hard-wired to be connected with each other as fellow pilgrims, fellow travelers on the Way.

This weekend Sue and I are happy to have friends in town – friends from our time in seminary almost 30 years ago. We've stayed in touch and visited each

other along the way, and now most of our group have made our way to Florida, so now we can get together regularly.

What a wonderful thing it has been to have these great friends, companions, all along the way. 30 years ago we spent time talking about parenting young children. Then it was surviving the teenage years. Then we entered the empty nest and the loss of parents. All the while praying and supporting each other in ministry and careers, in parenting and in life.

These days there's more talk about health concerns and the joys and challenges of parish life in these "interesting" times we live in. The friendship, prayer and support has helped each of us in ways big and small. There's been lots of laughter and a few tears along the way. Having companions on the journey, people who care and understand, people who love you, makes all the difference.

Jesus knew how important it would be for His disciples to be knit together with bonds of love to get through the challenging times and celebrate the good ones. Christian community, life partners, and special friendships are some of the kinds of relationships that Jesus had in mind when He sent His disciples in pairs.

Sent, in pairs, we are to travel light, to bring the blessing of peace, and to proclaim the Kingdom of God come near.

At the time of Jesus in the first century, the Roman Emperor was seeking to establish something called the "Pax Romana" – the Peace of Rome. The emperor sought to expand his kingdom through the subjugation of lands and the people living in them.

Roman soldiers went from place to place conquering smaller, weaker lands with the promise of protection and hopes for prosperity in exchange for tribute and obedience. The system increased Rome's wealth and expanded the Emperor's kingdom by subjugating people through intimidation, force and fear.

Imagine what it would have been like to be living in a village in Palestine when the Emperor's soldiers showed up. They required you to swear allegiance to a man who claimed to be God. They forced you to pay taxes, to give your sons for military service, and to provide your food and water to support the Emperor's army as he sought to expand his earthly kingdom.

Disciples of Jesus, by contrast, were sent out by the true Son of God to win allegiance, not through force, fear or intimidation, but through love. They didn't come demanding anything. They came to give: to love and serve.

They carried nothing, no arrows, spears or armor. They said "peace" upon entering, rather than "open up, or else!" They stayed and shared meals and built relationships, rather than taking and running off. They proclaimed a different kind of Kingdom- the Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of Peace and Love – that came near through them.

A very different experience when Jesus' disciples, his ambassadors, showed up at the door. When the kingdom of Rome came knocking, there were demands and threats and intimidation. When Jesus' disciples arrived, there was peace, hospitality, healing and love.

As Amy Allen puts it: "Where the Romans brought death and took plunder, the apostles bring life and restore relationships... God's peace is a peace founded on life, rather than death. On relationship, rather than enmity. On engaging in and accepting mutual hospitality, rather than building walls of division. For, indeed, the Kingdom of God has come – and is coming – near."

The lessons of today's Gospel are clear: We are sent as ambassadors of Christ to witness to the power of God's love. We go together. We are not alone in this work. And in the face of the powers of this world that seek to diminish, divide and subjugate through force and fear, we are called to proclaim the life-changing, world-transforming, liberating power of the love of God in Jesus.

Let us go forth to do the work that God has given us to do – to love and serve God and each other with gladness and singleness of heart. Amen

