

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | JULY 3, 2022

ISAIAH 66:10-14 | PSALM 66:1-9 | GALATIANS 6:1-16 | LUKE 10:1-11, 16-20

Imagine for a moment that you're driving down a highway where people drive really fast. Let's say—I don't know—287. You're going the speed limit of 55. And you realize that everybody else is driving way faster. You have people coming right up on your bumper and then swerving out of the way. And so what do you do? You speed up a bit. And then a little more. And right as you realize you're not even close to the speed limit, you see the nose of a squad car poking out from behind a rock. So you start rehearsing your explanation in your head. *If it were up to me, I would have driven the speed limit, but since no one else was, it was actually better for everyone that I drive way too fast, too.* Results may vary.

We don't act in isolation, but we respond to the environment around us. And it's the ways we respond and even what we respond to that are the subtext in today's readings.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus sends the seventy disciples out in mission. And what exactly does this mission entail? Basically, just more of what Jesus has been doing. "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.'" The context might be new, but the work will be the same.

Jesus tells them that things are going to go well a lot of the time. Jesus says that they will be accepted into people's homes, their proclamation will be welcomed, and their goodwill reciprocated. New connections, new relationships, new creation.

But there is an acknowledgement here that things aren't always going to go well. That there will be times when their proclamation and message will be rejected. But what is the counsel that Jesus gives for when that happens? "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."

What do you notice about Jesus's counsel in those two cases? They're the same. If you're accepted, proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near. And if you're rejected, wipe the dust from your sandals and then proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near.

This was probably a challenge for these disciples. It's certainly a challenge for us. After all, how do we react when we have success in our life together? Just like the disciples, we're filled with joy. We celebrate it. We send out a press release. We invite the bishop to come see what we did. But our reaction to rejection is probably what? To write them off. Good-for-nothings. Leave them behind. If you can't appreciate Jesus, then you probably don't deserve him. And you definitely don't deserve us. Our default setting is for our behavior, our goals, our practices to be defined by the behavior, goals, and practices of others. To treat others the way they treat us.

But Jesus tells us that instead of just reacting to other people's actions, we respond first and foremost to God's action. And that action is at the heart of today's reading: God's bringing the kingdom of God near to us in Jesus Christ. That is the central event that norms everything else in our lives. And so whether things go well or poorly or somewhere in between, we always have the same center to act from. Jesus doesn't tell us to treat others however they treat us. Jesus promises us that we can always love others the way God loves us.

There's something similar going on in today's reading from Galatians. St. Paul writes that there will be times when this community experiences conflict and things won't be going very well.

ADVENT LUTHERAN CHURCH

777 WYCKOFF AVENUE | WYCKOFF, NJ 07481

(201) 891-1031 | ADVENTLUTHERANWYCKOFF.ORG

And when that happens, there will be a temptation to start keeping score. And to puff up our own sense of superiority by pointing out the shortcomings of those around us.

Half of Americans can't remember the names of all their grandparents.¹ But the name of someone who wronged us ten years ago? You bet. Time, date, and location. And as soon as we get a chance to deploy that cutting remark that we've been sitting on, it's going to feel so good.

But what does St. Paul advise? "If anyone is detected in a transgression... take care that you yourselves are not tempted." That sentence is constructed kind of oddly. But it's basically saying, "Don't make other people's transgressions an excuse to commit your own transgressions." Don't make other people's hatred into an excuse for your own hatred. Don't make other people's aggression into an excuse for your own aggression. Don't make other people's indifference into an excuse for your own indifference. You can imagine the Galatians telling St. Paul, *If it were up to me, I would have been loving, but since no one else was, it was actually better for everyone that I not be loving, too.*

But St. Paul reminds us that we get freedom to control how we respond. Even when the shortcomings of others are readily apparent, we still have an opportunity to "fulfill the law of Christ... by bear[ing] one another's burdens." Or, as Jesus summed it up in today's gospel reading, even when we are rejected, we will have an opportunity to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near.

In Jesus, God gives us the ability to live with a kind of invested indifference. Invested because we are pursuing the flourishing of our communities and seek their welfare in all that we do. Invested because we offer healing and wholeness through our life and work. Invested because we are partners with the communities we live and serve in.

And yet, we remain indifferent. Indifferent not to the wellbeing of those around us, of course, but indifferent to whether our invitation to grow in Christ is accepted, rejected, or ignored. We don't need to wait and see what others do before deciding how to act. That's why Jesus tells us not to use your experience of rejection to try to cut people off from God's grace. And it's why St. Paul encourages us not to dunk on people for their shortcomings. The kingdom of God is not contingent.

Invested indifference means that our responsibility is to accompany and heal, to proclaim the gospel, no matter what. After all, the ultimate end of Jesus's life and the origin of our life together is the same no matter how cynical or insular or nihilistic the world around us, no matter how apparent the shortcomings of others or how well-hidden our own. We can be invested in the world because we are indifferent to whether it puffs up our own egos.

Because Jesus has entered the world, the kingdom of God has come near to all whom these seventy disciples encounter. And because Jesus has been raised from death, the kingdom of God remains near to all of us.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor

¹ "Index | Harper's Magazine," Harper's Magazine, accessed June 29, 2022, <https://harpers.org/harpers-index/>. It's 3/4 of people in Philadelphia for some reason.