

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – July 2, 2017 – Communion
Independence Sunday
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

FOR REFLECTION

Be the clay in love's hands ~ Supple and yielding.
Be the ripple in the pool ~ Always flowing and feeling.
Know your Source is your Guide ~ You are never alone.
As you open your heart ~ You will find your way Home.
- Beloved, Poet, <http://www.openyourhearts.com/poemlove.htm>

Where do we go?

Several years ago our family spent a long afternoon on the Fourth of July eating, watching our kids play in the water and partying at the home of one of Peter's friends. We got home tired and ready for bed, but at 8:30pm Peter insisted that the day wasn't complete without fireworks. After some arguing and tears and physical effort on my part to get moving again, he and I went down to Casa Grande Avenue (a few blocks south) where neighbors sit in the street and watch the Rose Bowl fireworks a couple of miles west of us.

When we arrived, Peter was sad that there were only two of us and longed to be with a family that had 6 kids and sparklers and bikes and all kinds of stuff going on. We went and stood behind them just to be part of the fun vicariously. A few minutes before the fireworks show started we were hailed by friends I met when I worked at Occidental College – math prof. Alan Knoerr, wife Sharon and daughter Julia (now a high school student). Julia had held Peter in her lap when he was a tiny baby. They invited us to sit with them, even went and got an extra chair, and Peter and his blanket ended up on Julia's lap snuggling. It was spontaneous community and Peter loved it.

As we packed up chairs Peter whispered, "Are we going to have a group hug before we leave?" I passed on the idea and our friends (not usually so demonstrative) were touched and delighted. We had a group hug and much laughter. It felt like Peter had envisioned the Fourth-of-July experience that he wanted – and then created it out of thin air.

I sometimes wonder if Peter's mission instructions at birth were, "Go to planet Earth and make family out of unrelated individuals. Build a village. Make community by

sheer will power.” How is that any different than, “Hey – you 70 people who share my value system: Go out and gather together the Beloved Community of G-d on Earth.”

Eugene Peterson’s version of our text from his interpretation: THE MESSAGE puts Luke’s version of Jesus’ “mission instructions” into our vernacular:

4 “Travel light. Comb and toothbrush and no extra luggage.

“Don’t loiter and make small talk with everyone you meet along the way.

5-6 “When you enter a home, greet the family, ‘Peace.’ If your greeting is received, then it’s a good place to stay. But if it’s not received, take it back and get out. Don’t impose yourself.

7 “Stay at one home, taking your meals there, for a worker deserves three square meals. Don’t move from house to house, looking for the best cook in town.

8-9 “When you enter a town and are received, eat what they set before you, heal anyone who is sick, and tell them, ‘God’s kingdom is right on your doorstep!’

When you leave, have a group hug and make plans to see each other again soon.

One interesting omission is that the text doesn’t tell us where everyone went. It says they came back on a high, thrilled by the power they were able to wield in the name of G-d. And Jesus lets them know that it’s what G-d has done for THEM (not what they have done for G-d) that is meaningful. There are no notes about how long they were gone or where they went, who they encountered and how many group hugs they had.

So, I have to deduce from this that it doesn’t matter where they went. They had the tools with them to create community WHEREVER they went. And those tools had nothing to do with what they took with them – which was close to nothing. They created community by having less than anybody they met. They created community by declaring peace and accepting any form of hospitality offered. They created community by not demanding better accommodations and being gracious with their hosts. They created community by healing the sick – and declaring that G-d’s Beloved Community was near or here or possible – should they decide to BE IT.

There is much I could say about how these instructions are very similar to street theatre enacted by the Greek Cynics of the day. I could tell you about how the instruction to eat anything put in front of you indicates they were in non-Jewish territory and were likely to be offered un-kosher food – which also indicates this was written after the mission to the “Gentiles” was underway. I could mention that the idea of offering a greeting and then, if unwelcomed, taking it back – was an ancient idea even 2000 years ago – the belief that the greeting itself magically became a physical entity – like a gift – that could be given and retrieved.

And I could tell you that the scholars agree that the use of the metaphor “harvest” does not gather its meaning from Matthew 13 – where it references G-d’s day of judgment.

It draws from Isaiah 27.12 – “On that day the Lord will thresh from the channel of the Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel.” It is about gathering together – reuniting – the scattered family of Israel. This last point is one that I believe matters most.

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner parses the word “yis-rah-ael” – Israel – which also means family.

Home is where they have to let you in simply because you’re you. And family are the people who live there. They are the ones you get whether you like them or not. In the last tally, they may be all any of us have. As Adin Steinsaltz is once alleged to have quipped, “The worst thing about being a Jew is that you have to associate with them.”

The power of congregational life comes precisely from this involuntariness of association. We look about the room and realize these people are not friends or even acquaintances; we do not agree with them about much; these are simply people we are stuck with. The often-cited teaching of the sages that “All Israel are intermingled with one another,” probably means something more like “We are all stuck with one another.” This generates a kind of love both more intense and more complicated than the voluntary variety. These members of our community, just like the people in our family, literally make us who we are.

The Book of Words pp.43-44

Which brings me to Kristin. She grew up Jewish, was homeless when I knew her, lived in a hearse, and attended South Bay Christian Church while I was an interim there. Kristin didn’t know that you had to JOIN a church. She delightedly went through baptism and the ritual of membership – but it was a novelty to her. A Jewish person is born Jewish and is a member of that community whether or not a choice is made. You are “stuck” with Israel and Israel is “stuck” with you.

But if we think this through, the same CAN be said of those of us born Christian. And even those of us, like Kristin, who have CHOSEN to be Christian. Once you are part of the Christian Community – you are “stuck” with the rest of the “Christians” – whether or not we agree theologically or politically or ethically about anything. We are Christ’s Village – complete with a few village idiots – many Elders and a common Myth about our Origins.

And, with Christ by our side, no matter where we go – we have what we need to re-create – gather together – expand – redefine – make out of thin air – G-d’s Beloved Community – complete with group hugs and fireworks.

This also means that WHEREVER we go – whatever “new” congregation we decide to visit or affiliate with – we are ALREADY part of the family – they are stuck with us and we are stuck with them as fellow Christians.

The relationship is easier if we graciously receive their hospitality and refrain from talking about how much more wonderful another congregation is or was.

And we are more welcome if we are a peaceful, healing presence rather than a complaining, divisive presence.

And we have a more meaningful experience if we remember that it is what G-d has done for us – rather than what we have done for G-d – that matters most.

Where do we go? It doesn't matter.

We go where we feel called, we go where we are sent.

We pack lightly and travel in pairs – never alone.

And in the Spirit of Christ –

we create once again the Beloved Community of G-d
wherever we are.

Scripture Reading for Sunday July 2, 2017 – Pentecost 4 – Year A

10 After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴**Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹"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."**

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¹⁶ 'Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.' ¹⁷ The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' ¹⁸He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but **rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**'

THE MESSAGE

Eugene Peterson

10:1-2 Later the Master selected seventy and sent them ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he intended to go. He gave them this charge:

“What a huge harvest! And how few the harvest hands. So, on your knees, ask the God of the Harvest to send harvest hands.

3 “On your way! But be careful—this is hazardous work. You’re like lambs in a wolf pack.

4 “Travel light. Comb and toothbrush and no extra luggage.

“Don’t loiter and make small talk with everyone you meet along the way.

5-6 “When you enter a home, greet the family, ‘Peace.’ If your greeting is received, then it’s a good place to stay. But if it’s not received, take it back and get out. Don’t impose yourself.

7 “Stay at one home, taking your meals there, for a worker deserves three square meals. Don’t move from house to house, looking for the best cook in town.

8-9 “When you enter a town and are received, eat what they set before you, heal anyone who is sick, and tell them, ‘God’s kingdom is right on your doorstep!’

10-12 “When you enter a town and are not received, go out in the street and say, ‘The only thing we got from you is the dirt on our feet, and we’re giving it back. Did you have any idea that God’s kingdom was right on your doorstep?’ ...

16 “The one who listens to you, listens to me. The one who rejects you, rejects me. And rejecting me is the same as rejecting God, who sent me.”

17 The seventy came back triumphant. “Master, even the demons danced to your tune!”

18-20 Jesus said, “I know. I saw Satan fall, a bolt of lightning out of the sky. See what I’ve given you? Safe passage as you walk on snakes and scorpions, and protection from every assault of the Enemy. No one can put a hand on you. All the same, the great triumph is not in your authority over evil, but in God’s authority over you and presence with you. Not what you do for God but what God does for you—that’s the agenda for rejoicing.”