

**COMMISSIONED**  
**Rev. Gregory Flint**  
**Luke 10: 1 – 11, 16 – 20**  
**July 4, 2010**

Well, dear friends, here we are, gathered on this Sabbath for song and sacrament, prayer and pie. And that's good and as it should be. But tomorrow we have God's work to do, out there in the world.

Just what you wanted to hear – right? You come here from lives that may well feel already overloaded with demands and responsibility – plates full, too much to get done in too little time. And then the preacher wants to lay on more.

But don't blame your humble preacher. Take it up with Jesus. He's the one who's saying there's work to do in the world in his name, for God's sake. In this morning's text, those who say they love Jesus are sent out, commissioned by him, given tasks. And the tasks are difficult and demanding.

Jesus looks around and he just starts choosing: "You and you; and you and you; all you in the back count off by two's, then one's pair up with another one, and two's get with two's in pairs; and you two over on the side trying to look invisible, you're now a pair."

And so it goes until there are 35 pairs, seventy people, ordinary folk, chosen by Jesus, commissioned, to head out into the world to do God's extraordinary work.

The seventy, which likely is symbolic for everyone who claims to follow Jesus, the seventy are empowered, given authority to heal, teach, confront evil, subvert systems of greed and oppression, model non-violence, bestow peace, and open people's eyes to the presence of God everywhere.

Whew! That's a big calling – to be living proof, witnesses in the world for what Jesus is trying to do, which has everything to do with God's extraordinary love.

Big...big calling. Big!

But I've seen you do it! I have personally witnessed your own living out of this calling and holy vocation in the world.

I've seen you step up and reach out in love, through the ministries of this church, and through all the other community serving things you are involved in.

I've seen you encounter great difficulty in your lives, in your families, in your jobs, in your trying to do the right thing. And I've watched you respond with grace and love and hopeful determination.

And I know, I've watched how sometimes your best efforts have been met by resistance. Sometimes what you offered in love was refused. Sometimes your personal sacrifice didn't seem to matter. Sometimes great effort was expended and nothing changed for the better. Then I watched you go on and try again.

I have enough evidence to know that the seventy Jesus called are still out there, witnessing to what God is up to in the world. I could name names. I could name lots of names. Suffice to say that you are the seventy, getting done what Jesus wants done.

But there's one more task. And I think it has particular urgency in our nation right now. So it's worth lifting up on this July 4<sup>th</sup> as work I believe we are well suited to do out there, as followers of Jesus, his commissioned ones.

The political polarization of our society has reached new and close to dangerous levels. The culture war has divided our nation and communities, split churches, created such distrust, anger and fear that it's nigh onto impossible for issues to be talked about or debated in a civil, open-hearted manner.

Oh, real historians may point out that we've had other periods in our history when disagreements over issues turned into vitriolic rage and even violence. Certainly so, but I find the current levels of disrespect, the personal attacks, the politics of rage, and the hateful rhetoric alarming.

Political debate, even vigorous debate, is a healthy thing for a democracy. But to question the integrity, patriotism, and even the citizenship and faith of those with whom we disagree is destructive of our national discourse and the fabric of our life as a nation.

So are we called, as Christians, to model a more civil, respectful, loving way out there?

Yes, we have to confess that the church has too often simply reflected and contributed to the divisions and war of words in our culture. But what does it mean to follow Jesus now, to be his commissioned ones, his seventy? Doesn't it at least mean being agents and voices of reconciliation in a deeply divided nation? Isn't it our high and holy calling to live Jesus' "Great Commandment" to love neighbor as ourselves, even when that neighbor sees things very differently?

When in the text Jesus sends the seventy out, he does not arm them for cultural war with strident ideology or belittling names to call those who differ. Jesus does not instruct them with talking points intended to fuel anger and create fear. He does not tell them to win at any cost or that victory means destroying an opponent.

Rather, in his instructions to the seventy Jesus says, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' And remain there eating and drinking whatever they provide."

In other words, for reconciliation to happen there first must be the desire for peace, born out of the belief that to find a way to love those who differ, even to love an enemy, is to love God.

And having desired God's peace, we will see those with whom we deeply differ, in a new way. Not as just wrong or as moral misfits, but as those also loved by God.

And then having seen them as beloved of God, we can imaginatively enter their world, seeking to understand their perspective, and how they see the world, and how they see us.

And having understood those who differ, mutual respect, healing, reconciliation is possible, even with enemies. Though the deep and serious disagreements may well remain. Reconciliation does not necessarily mean agreement. But reconciled people can continue to talk and respect one another, eat together and remain in connection, even love one another.

Which may not happen. Your efforts at reconciliation may be refused. Your attempt to love may not be wanted. The other may choose to continue in anger, grievance, and even hatred. Jesus warned the seventy of that.

And if that happens, Jesus instructed, do not escalate or retaliate or respond in kind. Rather, shake the dust off, he said, move on and try again somewhere else. For you are not required to be successful, Jesus said, but faithful.

So you've got work to do in the world, Jesus told the seventy. Go on ahead and prepare the way for me, he told them.

I know...I know - you're already doing a lot, the best you can. And being agents of healing and reconciliation in this world is a tall order – easier said than done.

Maybe my job, then, as preacher, is just to remind you of the most important thing in that text. That Jesus had great faith in the seventy – you and me.

So after the postlude we go out again into the world to keep that faith.