

**“The Fear of Looking Stupid”  
Spirit of Peace UCC**

July 4, 2010

Scripture – Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

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*Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20 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. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!” And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. 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 Kin-dom of God has come near you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kin-dom of God has come near.’ Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”*

*The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” Jesus said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”*

I am a Baby Boomer, but I tend to identify with the Gen X-ers, the generation immediately following the Boomers. It probably makes sense because I was born on the cusp of the Gen Xers...I am a late Boomer. I find that when I hear something about Boomers, it doesn't seem to apply to me...but if there is something written or said about Generation X, my ears perk up and I tend to pay attention, because Gen-Xers tend to be my people.

Recently I heard...on NPR...and I can't credit my source beyond that...that the number one fear in America has been surpassed. For a very long time it has been fear of public speaking. You'd think it would be fear of death, but it wasn't...it

was fear public speaking. Well now, as the Boomers head into retirement and the Gen-Xers move into positions of leadership, power and prominence in the culture, the number one fear is looking stupid in public.

I've decided that I do enough public speaking that I potentially look stupid a lot. So, I think my number one fear is actually being stupid.

That aside, the #1 fear, currently, is looking stupid in public. How does that fit for you? Do you fear looking stupid in public? I suspect that no matter what generation you fall into, you can identify a little with not wanting to look stupid in public.

Yet, on this weekend of parades and celebrations, I know there were scenes around the country of goofy looking adults throwing candy from homemade floats and little kids scabbling recklessly out into the streets to gather up that candy...the crazy people on the floats and the wildly out-of-control kids both having the time of their lives...neither afraid of looking stupid...yet, doing something way out of the ordinary. They were just of joy, fully embracing the spontaneity of celebration and the sheer fun of living in the moment.

Unfortunately everyday life is not a Fourth of July parade...and no one likes to look stupid...wrong...or foolish...no one wants to make a mistake in public. Apparently, abandoning ourselves to something that is out of our control creates fear for us. And, ironically, abandoning ourselves to something that is out of our control is exactly what we are called to do if we claim the Christian way of life as our way of life.

Let me explain using this morning's lesson from Luke.

In the chapters preceding this morning's scripture, Jesus had sent out his twelve apostles...and they had returned from their mission discouraged...and bemoaning the fact that they could do no deeds of power. They had lived our greatest fear...they had looked stupid in public.

So, Jesus sends out a second wave...and he tries something new...changes things up a bit and does a few things differently. He wasn't a robot for God...he was a part of humanity and had to find what would work, just like you and me. Well, this time, he is sending out 70 people to attempt to do what the twelve couldn't, but this time he sends them out in pairs. Perhaps Jesus was thinking what worked for God and Noah might work for him, too. If you consider Noah and the flood as

good storytelling, Noah, the ark and the animals, two by two, travelled the flood waters of chaos to bring new life. Once the waters had settled, the inhabitants of the ark brought hope and transformation to the world.

Perhaps Jesus saw the oppressive, cruel culture around him like the chaos of a flood, endangering everyone...and so, like Noah, he called together the apostles...teachers...to go out, two by two, to bring new life into the world.

So, the first way Jesus modified their approach was sending them two by two. His second adjustment was that he sent them specifically to houses. For the first 10 chapters, the author of Luke drives home the importance of hospitality and welcome in the homes of that day. In fact, as far as I can tell, Jesus and his followers have been afforded the opportunity to eat, drink and sleep their way through the countryside because of the kindness and hospitality of strangers.

They are going two by two...they are going to people's homes...and this time Jesus also includes instruction about what they are to say. He says to open every conversation with the sharing of Peace...in Hebrew the word for peace is shalom, which carries the meaning of wholeness and harmony and balance. They are to offer a word of peace...and also to say, "The kingdom of God has come near... it is near...it is close by." God has not abandoned you, God is here.

For some of you, this may sound too close to your experiences of the good Christian folk who go door to door to forthrightly and sometimes rather aggressively share the good news with you on your front doorstep. But try to let that go for a minute and simply absorb the instruction.

It is a personal approach in which you bring God's shalom into the house, showing the householders that in living your faith, you bring wholeness, harmony and balance...you, as a representative of the one who sent you, through YOU the kingdom of God is near. If you aren't accepted, leave the negativity behind you...wipe the dust off your shoes...and move on...but before you do, reassure them again that the kingdom of God is near. Embody shalom even in negative encounters.

I think those are great instructions about how we share our Christian way of life...but too often, I think we Christians have modeled our "telling" of the good news after the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

For Baby Boomers and older, you will likely know Matthew 28 best from the King James version, “Go ye therefore and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” If you are Gen-Xers or younger, you probably know the unfortunate translation from the RSV or the NRSV, “Go into all the world and *make* disciples of all peoples.”

That really is an unfortunate change in translation. “Go and teach all the nations” seems to model Jesus more than “Go and make.”

“Make” smacks of power over, doesn’t it? Like play dough, I’m going to *make* you into something...in fact, I’m going to *make* you into something of my choosing...it echoes childhood bullying phrases, “You can’t make me...” “Oh, yes I will...”

Making someone into a disciple also smacks of the “Do you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior? If you die tonight, do you know you will go to heaven?” school of thought. Lots of fear in those questions. Never truly effective, in my opinion.

Somewhere along the way, we Christians have misinterpreted “Go therefore” as “drag ‘em all in, do whatever it takes, scare ‘em if you have to...because it is for their own good” method of sharing the good news.

As I watch Jesus and his way of life, I don’t believe we are instructed to go and “make” someone else into something that is agreeable to us. We are simply instructed to “go”. Go and teach...go and tell your story...go and share your experiences of God and God’s community and God’s work in your life...go and show that you are a Christian by the way you love and live and engage one another...and in that way, as you live your Christian love, you invite people along if and when they are ready to want to explore a faith that brings you wholeness, harmony and balance.

When you go and speak “peace,” there is always that simple moment when you know you could step in and connect for God. You know, like when a co-worker shares with you that their mother has just died; or a classmate of yours shares with you that he has cancer; or a kid in your life shares with you that they are feeling badly because their friends have let them down; or the person who you usually sit next to at the soccer games confides in you that they partner is an alcoholic...those moments are when your peace is returned to you...and something opens up between you and that other person. It is in those moments...after you have shared

the peace of your presence...after you have shown that you care...after the person you are with shares their story...after all of that, you can share your story. Where it connects with God's story will be taken care of between you two, because most people in pain will respond to God's heart in *real* person.

Jesus didn't ask us to go out into the world to look or feel stupid in his name. Jesus did ask us to go, sharing the peace and love of God with those we meet along life's path. As you go from here, may you take God's shalom into every household and every interaction...and may it be said of you that the kingdom of God is near because YOU are near. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.