

## **“C” is for Community**

Luke 10:1-11; Isaiah 66:10-14

### **Slide: VBS**

Vacation Bible School was a blast! Four churches here in town got together and despite a very quick turnaround due to Luther Park’s staff shortfall and cancelation to lead it, our the volunteers of all the churches were able to provide such a packed, faith filled week of music, games, bible stories and crafts. The theme was “Sailing on the High C’s” - “C” as in the letter “C”, not Sea as in the ocean; it was a play on words. Each day of VBS, the word of the day began with this letter “C”. These words were: Creator, Compassion, Community, and Calling.

On Wednesday the theme was “Community” and our Summer Stretch youth, who also met on that Wednesday, were invited to create and run an obstacle course for the VBS children, which ended up being quite a hit for the kids. There were two teams up against each

other and a lot of screaming to cheer on each team. But, it was clear that one of the teams had a lot of the littler children and was a bit slower, so by the time the first team was won, the other team still had about five players to go.

The wonderful thing about it was, that the first team, remembering that the theme word was “Community” decided to cheer on the last five on the opposite team. It was really wonderful to see that support. These kids got the message that community is about supporting one another.

### **Slide: Women Quilting**

On the first glance of today’s Gospel reading, it seems like rather a daunting task Jesus sending seventy of his new followers who really have very little training in talking to people into what I would think is the world’s most difficult mission trip. This isn’t a service trip to go build homes for people in poverty

or raise some funds for the Community Table. This is the scary, uncomfortable door to door canvassing stuff that most of us avoid. I see two men in a suit approach my door and I simply don't bother answering. It's just simply not my jam this missionary work. Some people are definitely called to it, and we need that, but even Lutheran missionary work today looks very different than how they encountered the Gospel in the early church.

So, let's take a fresh look at this. First, Jesus says I'm sending you out like lambs to a den of wolves. Why would anyone sign up for that? I'm not certain I would. Go talk to people about the Kingdom being near, and by the way, don't bring anything with you. This sounds impossible to me. What is this really supposed to teach them? Is this a baptism by fire so to speak? Were they supposed to learn some hard lessons? Or, did Jesus simply just give them this power, the

power of the Spirit to move hearts?

### **Slide: Book Club**

Well, I think two things are going on here. Actually, there probably are more than two, but this week, let's just look briefly at two things. The first is about hospitality. Today, our tendency as people who might not even know our neighbors anymore, well... we may not fully appreciate the depth of hospitality that is in this passage.

In our first look at a Gospel reading like this, we often tend to impose our own cultural views upon scripture rather than trying to understand what scripture has to say up and against the culture in which we live. We do not understand what the world was like at that time, a world with social norms that were completely different from ours. The ancient world was set up so differently. Therefore, unlike today, strangers walking into a town asking for hospitality

because they had an interesting message to share were not at all an odd occurrence in those days.

And, hospitality, especially to people of your own ethnic group, was generally common. I do not mean racial, but ethnic. There is a difference. Race was varying in the ancient world and diversity was all over the place. But, when it comes to groups, they likely never would have welcomed Roman soldiers or oppressors into their homes, but rather wandering disciples of the very famous Jesus everyone is hearing about, absolutely, they would be received, welcomed, fed and have a bed to sleep in.

Coming with nothing into someone's home today may be viewed as asking for help but in those days, it was simply trusting and respecting the host who invited you in. It was forming community. It would not have the same effect as people knocking our doors today. So, clearly

Jesus is speaking about hospitality. Shaking the dust off your feet is about being received into community. It's about being welcomed.

The second, more important aspect of this Gospel reading is often overlooked but it is rather obvious. When Jesus sends seventy disciples out, they are not sent by themselves. They are sent in twos. No one is alone. In fact, there are 69 others for support, 69 who are in the same boat and having the same experience together even though not together all the time. These are friends in faith they could come back to and recount and rely upon for support in this mission Jesus sends them to. And, here Jesus is teaching them the importance of community. Missionary work is not a one man band, a charismatic solo. It's not TV evangelist or messiah figure.

**Slide: Summer Stretch**

In others words, we, none of us, do this alone. I think this is very important in our world, especially in this country. We spend so much time focusing on our individualism in the United States, on our individual rights and what we should have, that we often forget our great responsibility of what our own independence may mean for our neighbor. We often can forget to consider how our individualism affects the community. As much as we have been taught to go it on our own and our own way, the truth of the matter is, we are not alone; nor can we do anything in this world alone.

We need a hospitable community for which to thrive. We are interconnected whether we want to admit it or not. That should be every faith community. Notice that the disciples, when all 70 of them come back to talk about their power and their experiences. Do they spend all that time talking about those dumb people they got to leave and shake the dust

off their feet over? No. They respond with joy at their experience, of the hospitality and reception they received while traveling around spreading the Gospel. And, no doubt that joining in community again gave them energy, energy enough to go to the next task, the next town, and then Jerusalem. But, the point is, they had each other to make that joy possible.

The nature of our faith is radically communal. People who choose to believe what they want on their own without any boundary or consequences from a community often end up in trouble. No one can be an island. There is interconnectedness to each other and we often forget this in our day to day struggle of faith. Sometimes, we are so wrapped up in personal salvation and in our Jesus and me individual faith that we forget we cannot be alone.

**Slide: Pastor Julie @ VBS**

You know what this must mean then? It means that salvation is a communal phenomenon. Jesus was crucified once for all, not just for me or you. And, need I also say this Independence Day weekend, faith also isn't about me and my religion. It is about **us** and **our** relationship to the whole of creation in Jesus Christ. We are in this together, warts and all.

So, just as our VBS children learned about Community and cheered each other on to get to the finish line, let us work on doing the same for this beloved community, so that when we are sent out, which we are every time we share the meal and become the body of Christ, we will know the joy of being Christ for others in a hurting world.

Amen.