July 7, 2013 – 7 Pentecost (Proper 9)

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When I was in college, I spent a year studying in France. As I look back on that year, I realize that it was one of the most amazingly formative years in my life, but it didn't always seem so at the time.

For the first two years of college, I had played Dial-a-Major, skipping from Sociology, which seemed like a good idea even though I didn't actually know what it was; to German Literature, which I found just TOO depressing; and finally landing on French, which was easy and which I was moderately good at. I was going to be a high school French teacher. Weirdly enough, it never occurred to me to go into music as a major.

Anyway, a friend of mine, who had also been a French major, told me about a school in Angers, France for international students, and I became obsessed with spending my junior year abroad. Bear in mind that I was terribly immature – I still lived with my parents and my mom helped me buy all my clothes. But the idea took hold and nothing would sway me.

Long story short, a couple of days after my 20th birthday I set off on my big adventure. My mom told me long afterward that she kept looking down the jetway, expecting to see me come back, having changed my mind. No one could believe that I was doing this.

When I arrived in France, I got a huge shock. I didn't know French! At all! I THOUGHT I did – I had gotten straight As in all my French classes – but when I needed to put it to use, in the train station in Calais, I was barely able to form a single sentence and the person at the information desk couldn't understand me at all. At least, that's what I surmised from the torrent of idiomatic French pouring out of the window at me. I certainly couldn't understand a word she said.

What I had been trying to do was to find a hotel in Calais for the night so I would arrive in Paris in the daytime. What I DID do was hop back on the train and head to Paris at midnight, ending up in Paris' worst train station at 2:00. The hilarious thing was that I didn't even know that Paris had more than one train station.

So there I sat, shivering and terrified, all night long. I was terrified of the vagrants who periodically approached me for who-knows-what nefarious reason. Maybe it was a good thing I didn't understand them. And I was terrified that I would be arrested by the gendarmes who were periodically rounding up those vagrants and hauling them away, or at least kicking them out of the station. Never mind that I had a mountain of luggage around me, and was obviously a traveler. Whenever they came around I would bury my head in a book and pray they didn't notice me.

So that was my first day in France. I eventually found out where I needed to go and got to my destination with only one more incident. By this time, I had been up for nearly 48 hours straight, so I really crashed on the train to Angers. When I got there, another American on the train shook me awake and asked me if this wasn't the place I was getting off. Someone was announcing the stop on the loudspeaker – "Angers, Angers, deux minutes d'arret!" As I said, in spite of my studies I spoke and understood very little French, so I didn't know that this meant, "Angers, Angers, two minute stop!"

I had just gotten off the train when it started moving again. My new acquaintance helpfully chucked the rest of my stuff off after me and I was left trudging down the platform, pathetically gathering up my stuff and crying piteously. What on EARTH had I gotten myself into?

So I can imagine what Jesus's seventy emissaries might have been feeling. The difference being, of course, that I had a year's worth of stuff with me, being certain that I couldn't buy shampoo in France, and I had a place to stay where they were expecting me. These seventy brave souls headed out with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the faith in their hearts to offer blessings of peace, cure the sick, and proclaim the Kingdom of God.

We never find out who these people are, really. Luke isn't as tied to only 12 apostles as the other gospel writers are, so it's not surprising that Jesus is able to find seventy people to send out. But except for a mention of them returning with joy, we never hear of them again. I think this is significant. This is not so much an historical recounting of events as it is an indication of what the life of a faithful evangelist would be like.

"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.

Not only is Jesus asking them to be unencumbered, he's asking them to be anonymous. This wasn't about them; it was about God's power. And lest the mighty deeds they did went to their heads. Jesus reminds them on their return that they should be rejoicing not that they had cast out demons in his name, but that their names were written in heaven.

In other branches of Christianity, there is a great emphasis on being saved. To this end, you often see altar calls, especially at large evangelical gatherings. I'm not putting this practice down, and I completely cop to an outsider's perspective, but I have noticed that there seems to be a measure of success tied to the number of people who come forward at an altar call.

It's only natural. We want to think that we're being successful in proclaiming the Gospel, and sometimes it's nice to have hard numbers. We in the Episcopal Church use the ASA – Average Sunday Attendance – in a very similar way. We watch those numbers like a day trader watches the stock market, and I have even heard of many examples where people have inflated the numbers to make their parish look more successful. Everyone wants outside validation of what the Spirit is doing.

But here, Jesus offers the seventy no measure of success. Go into a town, wish them peace, stay a couple of days, do what needs to be done, proclaim the Kingdom of God, and move on. If they won't receive you, skip to the "moving on" part. Jesus tells them that they are not responsible for the harvest – that is God's domain. They are only to pray for more laborers to be sent into the harvest.

And they are to go about this business with barely anything to call their own. No money, no way to carry food or water, not even shoes! This is evangelism at its rawest. To trust God so completely is an awesome thing. I find it hard to put myself so completely in God's hands, even though I desperately want to. And the more layers we build around us – the vestments, the buildings, the Church structure, the music, even our liturgies – the harder it is to let go.

But these folks weren't really sent out with nothing. They were sent out in pairs. Even at its most basic, evangelism is not a solitary activity. We sometimes mock the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons for their quite obvious pairs of missionaries, but this is a very Biblical model of evangelism. And they not only had each other for company, they were to seek out a home to stay in – in other words, to form a mini community in each town they visited. Then, once they were welcomed in a home, they weren't supposed to look for a better deal somewhere else – better food, softer beds, more central location. They were to stay put and form relationships.

In today's mobile society, church shopping has become the norm. Until the middle of the 20th century, people just went to the church in their town or in their neighborhood. But now, since people can get around easily, it's a small matter to find a church that suits your needs rather than suiting yourself to your parish church.

Now, I'm not sure this is all bad, since people are at least GOING to church, but it does result in a new form of parochialism based on income and mobility. It offers the possibility of finding a church with other people who are just like us, rather than embracing diversity and it offers the possibility of leaving if something in a church isn't to our liking.

But back to the sending out of the seventy. How does all of this look for us today? Where is Jesus sending us, and what is our mission in the world? What would the Church look like if it were less encumbered and less focused on external measures of success and validation? What does offering peace, curing the sick, including casting out demons, and proclaiming the Kingdom of God look like in the 21st century?

Certainly, leaving our shoes, purses, and backpacks at home and walking from, say, Brookings to Pierre and asking strangers to put us up every night while we proclaim the kingdom of heaven, would get us at the very least some strange looks. But is there a modern equivalent? Do we need to start another evangelistic movement like the Great Awakening of the 19th century?

And what are the modern demons that we could cast out in Jesus' name? Would extreme poverty, homelessness, addiction, and despair count? If so, what can we do to cast them out of our society?

Who are the wolves that we are being sent out among like sheep? And what do we do with those who reject us, and reject God's message?

I don't know the answers to these questions. Actually, I don't even know all of the QUESTIONS to ask. But together we do – I'm convinced of it. Together we can figure out where Jesus is sending us and what we need to do, and then together we can set out to do what God is asking of us.

I've used this before, but I love this quote from St. Teresa of Avila about our work here on earth:

Christ has no body on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out to the world.

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.

Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.

Just like the seventy must have been nervous about setting out on this strange and potentially perilous journey, a certain amount of trepidation is only natural. Every day, every hour, every minute, we have to keep in mind that God is with us on every step of our journey, and we have to practice trust until it becomes the strongest muscle in our bodies.

The 20th century Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, wrote an eloquent prayer that sums up our uncertainty in the face of what God is asking us to do, and at the same time the beauty of God's presence in our lives. Let us pray.

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone." Amen.