

July 4, 2010
Lectionary 14c
Luke 10:1-14, 17-20
Pr. Craig M. Mueller

ALL SET

Jesus sent them out in pairs. Two by two.

Last week I was walking the streets of Evanston with a clergy friend in town for a visit. We were a pair of religious professionals, though it was a “day off.” I was in shorts and my face unshaven. Up ahead I spotted them. They were hard to miss. They were a pair. Young and clean-shaven. Wearing white shirts and ties.

I wasn't in the mood for a religious sales pitch. But I said hello as I passed them, trying to walk quickly. But sure enough, as I was past them, one quickly asked me if I believed in Jesus, or something like that. I turned and replied: *I think we're all set, but thanks. We've got a faith, a faith community. We have our salvation. We're all set.*

Oh, but he had his response ready. *But would you like to learn something new?* What a great question, I thought. *Of course*, I added. *We always want to learn more about God, life, the world.*

He was more than ready for that as well. *Did you know that Jesus Christ appeared in North America and the Book of Mormon is a record of that?*

I'm ready to move on. Wanting to be hospitable and not rude. But I know how this is going to end. So I come out. *Yep, I know about the Book of Mormon. Listen, we're two religious professionals. We're pastors. And we're all set. So thanks, and have a nice day.*

You have to admire people that feel so strongly about their faith that they are willing to approach strangers and share what is most important to them. But you wonder how many folks respond to that kind of evangelism. I don't know what it was about downtown Evanston that day, but we also saw Jehovah's Witnesses out witnessing. And Planned Parenthood and Environment Illinois were also out collecting signatures.

In today's gospel Jesus sends the seventy ahead of him. They are sent on a mission. They are to eat what is set before them. We might take that to mean they are to receive the hospitality of others. In other words: get to know them. They are also to cure the sick. And proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God has come near. They are all set, so to speak. Jesus has provided them what they need.

Independence Day is a good day to remember that we are a nation of immigrants. Last week the president gave a speech on immigration reform. Welcoming the stranger is at the heart of our call. Or as Paul exhorts in Galatians: Let us work for the good of all! For you reap whatever you sow.

The baptism of Pierce this morning reminds us that it not just professional clergy that are called. Our baptism commissions all of us. Each Sunday we are sent from this place. To care for those in need. And to be signs of God's healing and reconciling love. As we heard in Isaiah, God comforts us like a mother. And there will be times when we simply hold others in their time of loss or grief.

Most of the time we witness by the way we live. But are there times that we could *actually* talk about our faith with someone? Maybe we don't want to offend people. Or we don't feel qualified. But we can extend a compassionate, listening ear. We can hear their needs and questions. At times we may actually talk about the strength we find in our faith or from participating in a congregation. We might even invite them to church sometime.

Last year, *The Lutheran* magazine told the story of a pastor who would make himself available once a week. Wearing his collar, he would set up two collapsible chairs in downtown Santa Barbara, California. I don't think he was there to get people saved or to make them Lutheran or even Christian. He was simply there to listen. Some who stopped by were homeless or living with mental illness. Others were business people or tourists. They may never enter the doors of a church. But they were all seeking the Spirit amid the noise and bustle of the city.

We who are baptized into Christ are all set. We are sent on life's journey with everything we need. A community to support us. The gospel to comfort and challenge us. The eucharist to nourish us.

Whether you leave by yourself, in pairs--two by two--or as a family, you are all set! God has called you. Journey forth!