**7 Pentecost, July 7, 2013, 2 Kings 5: 1-14; Ps 30, Gal 6: 1-16, Luke 10: 1-20; The Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

Since I last saw you all, I have been doing lots of hiking on trails in National Parks in the West. We were hiking before the peak season, so the trails were not crowded; our National Parks have visitors from all over the nation and the world, but most come in July and August. While hiking up a long narrow trail around a mountain lake, Jim and I encountered a group of 42 senior citizens all in a line, led by an energetic tour guide with a clip board, from the country of Denmark. It was a crazy scene! This throng of unhappy, out-of-shape flatlanders without water were climbing a mountain at 8,000 feet! We had to balance on a precarious spot off the trail for them all to slowly pass by – this was not fun! As they passed, I looked at their faces and saw a range of life stories captured in their facial expressions. I had multiple choices of how to be when all these foreigners passed me: I could have been silent and condescending, I could have been upset and agitated, I could have blamed them for making me balance precariously, or I could have been calm and reassuring. This is just one example of interacting with new people; we are now in the midst of summer, a time when we are all interacting with new people: tourists. Today’s Scripture readings tell how we should behave with these folks, and with everyone we interact with in our daily lives.

In the Gospel, Jesus sends out the seventy disciples to share the good news of salvation through Jesus. We read this thinking about “them” but it actually is about **“us.”** The number seventy suggests ALL of us believers, from every nation. You see, each time you and I interact with other people Jesus is “***sending us out”*** as His ambassadors – as His ***laborers*** ***in the harvest fields***. We have been appointed to do an important task by an authority figure, and in this case it is THE ultimate authority figure: God. And there are not enough of us….we each are needed to share the love of Christ with others. This is not just the purpose of ordained ministers or missionaries, it is the work of ALL Christians. Every time we interact with others, we are being sent out by Jesus! And, Jesus does not tell us that this will be easy. Jesus says it will be ***“like lambs into the midst of wolves.”*** Jesus’ didn’t really mean we would be devoured by wolves -- He meant that it would not be easy to be His hands and feet and voice in the world. In fact, it will make us vulnerable to rejection and ridicule.

Recently, I read about the research of a sociologist named Brene Brown on the subject of vulnerability. In her book, she claims that "**vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences**....**if we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path....it is the birthplace of everything we're hungry for: joy, faith, love....you've got to be open enough to risk failure."** Indeed, Jesus gets this. As we serve God everyday in every interaction, we are vulnerable -- but God has our backs -- so the risk is low, we need not fear.

Jesus goes on in the Gospel, telling us what to say when we meet new people: ***“first say, “Peace …And, if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person.”*** In other words, we are to be a calm, peaceful presence (filled with Christ's love ).

OK, back to my hike around the Lake: God gave me an appointment I did not ask for, balancing on the side of the trail as those 42 people from Denmark went by. As I quickly thought how to be with them as they all walked by, I realized that this was part of my life purpose from God! So, I prayed and got the strength from God; the key was in this Gospel verse: “***The Kingdom of God has come near to you.”*** Because God is so close, I can do this! Because Jesus’ love is so powerful, I can share God’s love in this weird situation. So, I was able to do what I was needed to do: be a calm, peaceful, friendly, reassuring presence to each and every one of those 42 people as they struggled by. I said things like, “**you can make it!”** “**it’s worth it**! and “**welcome to the USA**.” And, I looked down and saw that my cross, which I wear all the time under my clothes, was out on full display for them to see. This was all about God, not me. I have no idea about what the impact of my interactions with these people will be in the long term—but I know that they must have gotten a sense of God being near them that day in that beautiful place.

Today’s Psalm and Epistle speak to our God given purpose as well. We heard in our Galatians reading the familiar words: ***“you reap whatever you sow…if you sow to the Spirit you will reap eternal life from the spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right.”*** Indeed, it is not easy -- but we need to recognize and claim our purpose, and keep those appointments God sets up for us. I love the Psalms, because they contain so much raw human emotion! While I was on that trail, I was unhappy that my hike had to stop for a long time and my peace was interrupted and I was put in a precarious spot while I waited for all those people to go by! My natural instinct was to complain. In Psalm 30, the Psalmist is crying out to the Lord and then we hear some of the most reassuring words of the bible, “***weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning….you have turned my wailing into dancing…my heart sings to you without ceasing.***” Yes, we will struggle – there will be wolves, we are vulnerable, we will experience failure as we share God’s love with others – but God turns our wailings into joyful dancing!

You have received the greatest appointment anyone could ever receive. God needs you to represent Him, to share His love in your environments. And, the best way to do this is just to do it. Maybe it is on the phone or in your home, or at a party or around a campfire, or at work, or in a store---but make no mistake about it --people's lives will be impacted for the better when they experience God's love through you. And, God will give you strength: the kingdom of God will be very near to you!Let us pray together the collect for today. O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.