

ISO: Peace
Luke 10:1-11
July 8, 2007
Rev. Emily Peck-McClain

In June of 1998, a group of men, women, and children with the left Philadelphia for a bus tour around the country. They called themselves freedom riders and were searching for stories of economic human rights violations to present to the UN and the world community. Where did they go? Massachusetts, Ohio, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kansas, Colorado, California, Texas, Washington, D.C., New York. And other states, too. What did they learn? People all over this country live every day without what these freedom riders consider to be basic humans rights: The Right to Jobs at a Living Wage and Just Conditions of Work; the Right to Food, Clothing, Housing, Health Care and Services; the Right to Education. They presented violations of these basic human rights, like this one from a woman in Elizabeth, New Jersey:

I am a formerly homeless mother of two. I was on public assistance when I had my first son at a very young age. Up until that time I thought that getting a job was my answer to all my problems of poverty, so I went out in search of a job. I found one that did not pay me a living wage. I brought my first pay stub in to my case worker. My Medicaid and food stamps were cut. So I could not no longer afford to pay for my food, clothe my children, and pay rent. I became homeless; I was in a shelter for a year. I'm no longer in a shelter. I live in a two-bedroom apartment with ten people, because...there is no affordable housing. A one-

bedroom can be anywhere between \$500 to \$600 rent. So I share this apartment with ten people to make it.¹

This bus full of people “travelled to over 30 cities across the country, linking up with grassroots organizations of poor and homeless people fighting for their lives. At each stop, the bus gathered documentation of economic human rights violations, which were taken to a concluding tribunal at the United Nations. The documentation will be used in a formal suit against the United States through international legal channels.”² They went out in the name of human rights to be a voice for those whose voices are ignored in our society and to work for justice. They went on a bus and they went on faith that they would gather what they were looking for and find all they needed to make it through those 30 cities. There are countless stories from this trip you can find online. They made a documentary.

As Christians, we are called to go out and to spread the message of Jesus’ Gospel of justice, mercy, love, peace, and of the coming of a kingdom on this earth that reflects the kingdom of our God who made it. In Luke’s Gospel this morning we hear of Jesus sending out his disciples in the way we have inherited. Take nothing with you, you’re going out to work for God. You don’t need the things you think you need. What you need is to be accepted in peace and then you’ll be able to do everything – eat, cure, and teach them about the kingdom of God.

When I picked the title for my sermon this week, I had no idea that people might not know what it meant. My in-laws were visiting us this week and they wondered if it was some industry term and how it would relate to the Gospel. Good question – but that’s

¹ <http://www.kwru.org/ehrc/tribunal/hrtrib08.html>

² <http://www.kwru.org/kwru/kwrufaq.html#action>

not what it stands for. Does anyone know? It stands for “In Search Of.” You know like, “Non-Smoking male ISO room in apartment, furnished, reasonable rent, doorman building.” I picture these disciples walking around in search of peace. If they were here today, their Facebook or My Space profile would say their relationship status was “traveling partners in Christ,” and they were looking for “peace.”

Jesus said to them, “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.” I love the idea that as followers of Christ, we carry with us the ability to bring peace wherever we go. We can enter a home and say, “peace!” and if the people there will share in it, our peace (Christ’s peace) can rest on those people. I wonder sometimes if what I carry with me is peace? I know when I go out, I carry all kinds of stuff Jesus says I don’t need to take in my work for God – I take a purse (and just in that alone is hand sanitizer, my wallet, my metrocard, lotion, eye drops, breath mints, a little notebook, a pen, and chapstick). I’ve never left without shoes on my feet. So except for the fact that Jesus says, “Greet no one on the road,” I completely ignore his directions. It’s pretty easy to walk around and get on the train and whatnot without greeting anyone. But aside from all the other stuff I carry with me – do I carry peace? Do you? Do we bring with us the message of the kingdom of God wherever we go? Do we bring love? Do we bring justice? Do we show to the world faith in the possibility of the kingdom of God?

I think our challenge from this text that we’re asked to rise to this morning is the challenge of letting the world see God through us. Try bringing peace into your work tomorrow. I’m pretty sure that if you walk into your office and exclaim, “Peace to this office!” People will get a little suspicious. But if you go through your day looking for

people to rest your peace, the peace of Christ on, how will your coworkers react? What if you have a lunch date this week with a friend – can you rest your peace from God on them? How will the lunch be different?

There is another part to Jesus' directions here that I haven't touched on. What happens if people don't accept what you bring with you? We are afraid of rejection. Most people like to be liked. We might even define our self-worth by the number of friends we have on a mass email we send out with our update address on it or something. But somewhere along the way, perhaps in elementary school, we learn that not everyone will like us. There will be people who are annoyed by our personality, there will be people who don't like our sense of humor, there might even be people who are offended by the way we might choose to live our lives. Jesus knew that when the disciples brought the message of the kingdom of God with them, they would hit some resistance along the way. They were sent so they go. They bring the message they believe in and for those who won't hear it, they don't dwell in the feelings of rejection or self-pity. They don't blame themselves. They shake the dust off their shoes, say a last word, and head off to the next town.

Here's the thing: When you bring the peace of God, the love of God, and message of the kingdom of God with you, there will be people who just don't get it. There will be people who don't see the vision of a peaceful, just, loving world. It's not your fault. You say your truth, you love them anyway, and you move on. God doesn't fail so when God wants the world to change into a place that reflects its Creator, it will happen. So you go out and do what you're called to do. Jesus doesn't say that the harvest is plentiful and

you're the only worker. He says the workers are few. But with a few committed workers and a message of justice, love, and peace, God can do a whole lot.

The people on the bus in 1998 traveled across the country with a message that people deserve human rights, even if they're poor, even if they've lost their jobs, even if they are living with a disability. Their message was clear at the end of their journey: there are violations of human rights in this country and the truth of them needs to be told. There were, and are, those who reject this. But the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, and thousands of others keep working because they know their message of economic justice is important. They work ISO peace and justice for those whose stories are ignored.

As we go about our week, my prayer is that we remember to bring the message of God with us wherever we go, that we might find those to rest our peace on, and that we will not tire when we feel ignored or resisted. God's love will be the harvest in the end; and until then let us continue our work to build up our world into a place that reflects our amazing Creator.