

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 10:1-20

"Playin' It Safe"

There was an old farmer, ragged and barefoot, who sat on the steps of his pretty worn-down shack, chewing on a stem of Timothy grass. A passing stranger came by and was searching for a cool drink of water. Trying to start a conversation and get acquainted with this farmer, the stranger asked, "How is your cotton coming in this weather?"

"Ain't got none," replied the farmer.

"Didn't you plant any?" asked the frowning stranger.

"Nope," said the farmer, "fraid of weevils."

"Well," asked the newcomer, "how is your corn?"

"Didn't plant none," replied the man, "fraid there warn't goin to be no rain."

"Really, well, what did you plant?" asked the puzzled man.

"Nothing," said the farmer. "I'm just playin' it safe!!!"

Jesus sends out 72 people to heal, to preach by saying, "*the kingdom of God is near you.*" Jesus sent out these 72 because He knew that everyone in the kingdom of God has the responsibility to witness to Him. He knew that He would be leaving this earth and the only way people would know and hear about His love for them, His sacrifice for them, His grace and mercy for them - would be for His disciples to tell others. So Jesus sent them out to practice, to get a feeling for what they would be doing when He was gone. He was not playin' it safe!

I would ask you to notice that Jesus doesn't say it is going to be an easy task witnessing for Him.

- He tells the disciples that they are like lambs in the midst of the wolves.
- Jesus tells them what to say when people accept them,
- and then He also tells them what to say and do when people reject them because He knew not everyone was going to accept the good news of His kingdom.

But the important point to remember is that Jesus wanted the disciples, the 72 to try, to go out among the people and tell them about Jesus.

These apostles were told by Jesus to travel light. How many of you can travel with only a small valise? Have you ever stood in an airport and watched people? They might be going away for just a weekend and they have 3 or 4 rolling bags! If they are blessed they have someone taking care of the rolling bags, but... that is another story. They (the 72) were told to pack extremely light. The Lord's instructions to greet no one on the road showed the urgency of their prophetic mission representing God. In that culture it was offensive to withhold greeting others, and devout people tried to be the first to greet a person who was approaching. (Jewish teachers of the Law agreed, however, that you should not interrupt your religious duties like prayer in order to greet someone.) Hospitality is very important in the Middle East, believe it or not.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 3, 2016, Year C

On our first trip to Israel in 1999 my family and I were treated to an extraordinary experience, dining in a Bedouin tent! Believe me it was like nothing we had ever done before. We were welcomed in a most hospitable way – and then offered us something to drink and then even some entertainment. He had a stringed instrument that he played. The leader roasted coffee beans on the open fire, ground them and then made our drinks. Next we moved to another area where we were to recline on pillows enjoying a Mediterranean feast of lamb, vegetables, bread and humus. We were treated very well; in fact we were treated like royalty! I cannot even begin to describe to you the trays of desserts that they brought out. This served as a real reminder to us of the worldview of the Middle Easterner. Hospitality to travelers is a crucial virtue.

I struggle when I think of going to a strange land – especially if I will be depending on the hospitality of others. I am a little better having been to Israel twice – some of the unknown is gone. I think of missionaries that I know personally, like our friend Susan Morris from Redeemer in Jacksonville, who has been a missionary a few times in Uganda. And then there's Fr. Marc and Suzanne Jacobson, who we went to seminary with – who live in Capul, Philippines; and they are there teaching people to translate the Bible into the native language. They have a home there – and they rely solely on the generosity of others to survive. If you remember just last year – here at St. Andrew's we welcomed Sharon Steinmiller of New Wineskins Missionary Network – who served in China a few years back. She shared with us a little bit about that experience as well as how New Wineskins has been helping missionaries all over the world to get the Word out! I also cannot forget how our daughter, Theresa served with Youth with a Mission (YWAM out of Jacksonville) and went to Turkey for 8 weeks. I am not sure that is something that I would feel safe doing; they never went put alone, going out; at least 2 by 2, to bring the Gospel to Muslims. I have got to tell you, she is certainly one of the bravest people I know. I think of the thousands of Anglican Missionaries who are doing the very same thing – walking in faith to spread the wonder and majesty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All of them trying to remain obedient and faithful – and to let the light of Jesus shine – showing others the Way to salvation.

In John 14, on the night before He died, Jesus is telling the disciples about heaven and that He is going to prepare a place for them. Thomas wants to know the way to get there, and so Jesus answered, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (Usually this is where people cut it off and say 'that's very nice', but we need to see the rest of what Jesus is saying.) If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."* Philip said, *"Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."* Jesus answered: *"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."* (John 14:6-11) Jesus could not make His identity any plainer – so that they would understand and be able to share the absolute truth about Him. He said *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."* Just as an

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 3, 2016, Year C

aside – let me say this: the eleven disciples and Matthias, who replaced Judas, were willing to die. If this were a made up story or some fabrication – do you think they would have been willing to die the terrible deaths that they did? They went forward and said ‘do your worst – because we have been with the best!’

Jesus sends the 72 and other missionaries to follow the model which He showed us – healing the sick and praying. Jesus performed miracles so that people would believe in Him, and He asks us to do the same, in fact, in John 14 verses 12-14 Jesus explains *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”* When Jesus makes the promise that if we ask for something in His name, He will do it, it is in the context of bringing people to faith! My brothers and sister – this does not mean that you need to go around laying hands on others – trying to be Benny Hinn or Ernest Angley – but instead to be an intercessor – praying for others. NOT playin’ it safe – but trusting in the power and promise of Jesus! I want to suggest to you that a great way to start is to take home our Sunday Bulletin and pray for the names on our Prayer List. You can do it anywhere you want in the comfort of your home, office, or prayer closet – just like in the recent movie “War Room.” Take it home with you today! I would be greatly blessed to see not a lot of bulletins left in the back of the church. Use the prayer list!

And you know what - even if God does not perform a miracle through your prayers, people are usually touched deeply that you would care for them enough to pray for them. Prayer touches the hearts of people - all the arguments in the world may not touch a person’s heart, but personal prayer will. When we pray for people, the first thing that we should do is to invite the Holy Spirit to come and touch them - He will, and they will have an experience of the presence of God. You cannot argue them into that type of experience.

This is where we need to be connected to God ourselves. We can have a thousand good true words for a person, but if God is not in them, they will brush off the person like water off a ducks back. We can see people’s eyes glaze over as we speak. But God knows the words, and the actions that will go to someone’s heart. The ‘feared word’ in the English language begins with a ‘E’; Evangelism. When you mention Evangelism a lot of times people run the other way. Let me tell you what I believe Evangelism can be; it is not just about getting someone to pray ‘the sinner’s prayer’ but about listening to see where people are at – first. We need to be good listeners – first - before we even open our mouth, but it is also about listening to God for them, to hear what He is saying to us about them and how we are to pray for them.

Blessing our neighbors, developing relationships with them, and praying for them is presenting the Gospel to them. We can be like Peter who on the day of Pentecost had all these people wondering what was going on with all the strange noises, and languages, and tongues of fire. And he got up and said "this is God, and this is what he wants to say to you..."

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 3, 2016, Year C

We will have an incredible opportunity to join with others in our community in a Prayer Walk on Saturday, July 23rd – praying for the communities in which we live. What a great opportunity to pray for and bless our neighbors – with the very same message? I don't know about you – but when I stand before Jesus I don't want to be accused of “playin' it safe!”