

*Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us; Open our hearts to be changed by that Word.*

My parents lived in Turkey for three years,  
and I had an opportunity to spend two months there one summer.  
Turkey is an amazing, beautiful country with gorgeous coastlines on three large  
bodies of water, the Aegean, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.  
One day we were exploring the Black Sea coast, which has some wonderful sites of  
antiquity. But we also wanted a little beach time.  
We spotted a few beaches, but they all had people on them.  
Finally we came upon one that was unpopulated, and we settled in on the sand.  
After a little while, we saw a group of men come down the way and set up not far  
from us. They were Turkish soldiers enjoying a day off. As an awkward  
22-year-old in a bathing suit, I was not thrilled, and even more mortified  
when one of them came over and invited us to join them for lunch.

We tried to say no, but it is very hard to refuse Turkish hospitality.  
My father soon caved, and off we went, across the sand,  
to where they were industriously making lunch.  
One person was getting a grill going, with kofte of spiced ground meat on skewers.  
Another was chopping tomatoes and cucumbers into a tray of lettuce.  
Another was breaking open gorgeous warm loaves of *ekmek*, delicious Turkish bread.  
We tried to say, "No thank you, we've already eaten,"  
embarrassed that we had nothing to contribute.  
But before we knew it, plates of wonderful food were before us. I don't think  
anything has ever tasted as good as that unexpected picnic on the beach  
with strangers, unable to speak their language, able only to say thank you.

I've often thought of that story as an example of unexpected, unmerited grace.  
But it hadn't occurred to me that it was also a lesson in receiving hospitality.  
I suspect many of us are very good at offering hospitality.

But how are we at being guests? At accepting invitations?  
At receiving what is offered graciously, even when we cannot reciprocate?  
If we're not able to be good guests, we won't be great hosts.  
And we won't be such great disciples, either.

What is the greatest enemy of the Good News of Jesus Christ?  
It's not atheism or secularism, or indifference, or even materialism.  
I think the biggest obstacle to receiving and proclaiming the Good News of God's love  
in Christ is self-sufficiency, an American virtue which is not a Christian one.

Our Bible promotes not self-sufficiency but radical dependence on God and others,  
God's love lived out in community, not lone-wolf style.

Jesus makes it clear when he sends out 70 newly minted disciples that they are to  
go forth in his name, packing only the supernatural power and love of God,  
and relying on strangers whom they meet for everything else.

No luggage, no money, no shoes, no stash of food, no hotel rooms.

Whoever welcomes you, stay with them and eat what they offer.

Don't move from house to house, don't get chatty on the road.

Heal whoever you meet, and proclaim the Good News that God is with them.

Actually here, his power and love present with them, in the power and love you  
bring. If they buy it, stay. If they don't, leave. Pretty simple.

In this story is the invitation to live on mission in a posture of radical receptivity.  
It's actually a command – he doesn't say, "Why don't you...", but "Go on your way."  
That is a challenge for many of us – we're wired to give, to host, to arrange.

That's all good – and it also keeps us in control. Being a good guest means yielding  
control. I see in this teaching an invitation, a command, to get better at being guests.  
Better at relying on the hospitality and generosity of others.

And to do that we need to cultivate a spirit of radical trust. That's hard for many of us.  
Naaman, the commander in the Syrian army in our first story this morning,  
had to learn this. Military folks are used to being in charge – they're paid for it.

When he is struck with a serious illness, he leverages his huge influence.

But nothing works. The only solution offered comes from a Hebrew slave girl  
who works in his house – the most subjugated of the subjugated.

She says there is a man of God back home who can help him –

and Naaman has the power and resources to arrange a meeting.

But the prophet Elisha doesn't even deign to meet him – just sends his servant out  
with the simplest of instructions – wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River.

Naaman is outraged. For someone who likes being in control, this is galling.

This prophet won't even come out to meet him? Do his hand-waving ju-ju?

But once again a servant speaks gentle truth – think about the role of servants  
and slaves in this story. He says, "Why not try it." Trust. Trust.

And Naaman emerges with new skin. New covering. New identity.

And new faith in the God of Israel. He has a God-story to tell.

What are your God-stories? The times God has shown up in your life  
and transformed what looked like disaster into blessing,

or brought healing and life, or hope when it looked like death had won?

You're here this morning, so I'm betting you've known some transformation.

Who in your life, or in our community, needs to hear the story you bring?  
You can invite them here, but chances are they're going to hear you better  
where they live. Where is the Spirit sending you?  
Jesus didn't say to the 70, "Go out and get people and bring them to church."  
He said, "Go out and heal the sick and proclaim the nearness of God."  
*Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you;  
cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."*

These "rules of the road" invite us to see every day as a mission trip, every day  
as a chance to carry the Good News of freedom to people we encounter.  
We're told the seventy were sent to every place Jesus himself intended to go.  
We can assume he wants to go everywhere – and he sends us as his advance team.  
Here's a spiritual practice to try: ask every morning, "Where, to whom,  
are you sending me today, Lord?" God will answer that prayer!  
Or maybe you've been feeling a ministry nudge to reach out to a particular community –  
people in recovery, or not yet in recovery; returning citizens after incarceration;  
Stressed out mothers, anxious teenagers...  
I've been thinking about the people who are homeless, camping out in the woods.  
What if we were to bring some food to the woods and say, "We brought this...  
who wants to help make it?" And mutually prepared a meal, instead of delivering one?  
And offered to pray with anyone who wanted it?  
Anytime I offer prayer in public someone takes me up on it.

This is the Good News we have to share with friends or colleagues or strangers:  
"The Life of God has come near you. You are not on your own with the things that  
challenge you. There is a God who made you, who loves you, who contains you,  
who wants to shower blessings upon you. Here is how I've experienced that blessing... "  
And then you talk about the blessings you have experienced. That's all.  
If we're the advance team, we just make the introductions and get out of the way.  
It's the Holy Spirit who makes Jesus known to us.  
But if people don't hear our experiences, they won't want to know Jesus.  
We don't close the deal – but the deal won't happen without us.  
As we talk easily and naturally about how we experience God in our lives,  
it creates an opening in other people. We make space for grace.  
The rest is up to the Spirit of Christ.

As we become radical receivers of hospitality and goodwill, as we become practiced  
at living a life of radical trust, we will have more and more God stories to tell.  
We will exult as did those seventy – "Dude! This stuff really works!"  
And we will have unexpected feasts to tell about as we go as guests.  
*Amen.*

**Luke 10:1-11,16-20**

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. 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. 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; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near."

'Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.'

The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

**2 Kings 5:1-14**

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.