

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

*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.*

I'm doing a lot of packing this summer – and what was Jesus thinking?
No purse, no bag, no sandals? This is summertime!
Greet no one on the road? I wave at strangers when I'm out walking.
I guess my excuse is, I'm going on vacations, not missions. Or could they be both?
Few of us actively think about "going out on mission."
We stay in our grooves, among the people we know,
 working, playing, praying, eating, meeting ...
How do these words of Jesus to his followers speak to us?

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.
What if we developed the spiritual practice of asking every morning,
 "Where, to whom, are you sending me today, Lord?"
God will answer that prayer!

If we were to cultivate that posture of being on mission in our lives,
 we also need to cultivate what Jesus says: a posture of radical receptivity.
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.
Jesus invites us, commands us, to get better at being guests.
At relying on the hospitality and generosity of others.

I once organized a Pentecost worship service in a downtown park in Stamford, CT.
A guy who was homeless came and hovered on the edges, and one of my
parishioners struck up a conversation with him, offered him some of our picnic.
She felt the Spirit nudging her to get to know him, so she started going down
 there once or twice a week to talk with him. She wanted to give him things,
 food, supplies – but he rarely accepted. What he wanted was for her to listen
 to his stories. What he wanted was the opportunity to give something to her.

She had to learn to receive his hospitality.

How might we let the people who use our Food Pantry give to us?

How might we let the youth we're meeting in our outreach to foster kids give to us, use their gifts to help us out?

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 he is 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 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.

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

But once again a servant speaks gentle truth –

notice that the servants and slaves have all the wisdom 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.

*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."*

That is the sequence: build a relationship by accepting hospitality offered;

Bring the healing love of Jesus into that relationship, and tell your God stories.

Proclaim the Good News: "The Life of God has come near.

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 talk about the blessings you have experienced. That's all.

When 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.

But if people don't meet God-people who are all about connecting them with the fiercely accepting love of Jesus, they won't invite the Spirit to come. We don't close the deal – but the deal won't happen without us.

We don't have to leave home to engage people with the accepting love of Jesus. We have opportunities right here this summer.

Wayside offered a chance to get to know people in conversation last week at the Family Fun Fest. La Plata is hosting three concerts this July.

You may not want to go out on a Saturday night, but push out of your comfort zone, invite some friends to dinner in town, and come to the garden at 8. No, come at 7:45, so you can chat with people before the music begins.

And you can do this on the other roads you travel, bring your spiritual self into your secular relationships. Here's a question that does that quickly: "is there anything I can be praying about for you?" You'll get a look of surprise, and some people will back away quickly. Others will say, "Wow, thank you..." and tell you some things going on. That might prompt a God-story in you. Or even a prayer request you make of them.

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."

The rest is up to the Holy Spirit, who is with us in these encounters.

As we engage people in spiritual conversation,
as we become practiced at living a life of radical trust,
we will have more and more God stories to tell.

Wouldn't it be great if we come back from our travels this summer like those 70 came back to Jesus after their mission foray, exulting. "Wow! This stuff really works!"

God's power is real. New life, new skin, new faith is real. And the only way to find it is to walk in trust.

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.