



From the Pulpit: July 3, 2022

Independence Day Weekend

The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg

Luke 10:1–20

To Bless the Space Between Us, III: Thresholds

This summer at Kenilworth Union we're preaching the sermon series called *To Bless the Space Between Us*, which is based on a book by John O'Donohue. He's written this book with many many blessings and prayers including the one this morning that we opened worship with. Today we're talking about *Thresholds*.

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 'Go on your way; 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 a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return 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.'

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. Indeed, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you.

In this morning's text, Jesus deputizes a small army of 70 evangelists to help him teach about the Kingdom of God. The first thing to notice is that Jesus does not send his helpers out alone. He commissions 70 disciples and sends them out in teams of two.

So there are 35 pairs of two. This must be the text that inspired The Mormons with their white shirts

and skinny black ties, and the Jehovah's Witnesses with their Watchtower magazines, always knocking on doors, always crossing unfamiliar thresholds, two by two. So we do not tackle this task alone. That is the very purpose of the Church: to make sure that we are part of a company of at least 70 to help us share the Good News of the Kingdom.

The second thing to notice is that Jesus says "Whatever house you enter, say 'Peace to this house.'" That's always our first move: Shalom, grace, and respect; never suspicion, disdain, or defensiveness.

The third thing Jesus says is, "If a town rejects your peace, just shake the dust from your feet, because you are responsible for the

message, not the **response**. Don't waste your time. Go somewhere else. Just shake it off.

"The third thing Jesus says is, "If a town rejects your peace, just shake the dust from your feet, because you are responsible for the message, not the response. Don't waste your time. Go somewhere else. Just shake it off."

In *The Christian Century* last week, Liv Larson Andrews asks, “Did you know that Taylor Swift got her inspiration from the Bible?”¹

Players gonna play, play, play, play
Haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate.
I’m just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake
Shake it off.

It’s one of the funniest and wisest songs of the last decade. Do your best. Know when to quit.

So Jesus says: Don’t try it alone. Speak Peace. Shake it off. So what happens when the Lectionary passage from Luke meets the Fourth of July? In what particular, eccentric way is this God’s word for us today?

Well, how about this: Americans no longer know how to talk to each other. We live in a riven land. I mean, in our defense, Americans haven’t been able to catch a break for the last two years. It’s been just one damn thing after another—a pandemic, masks, shut-downs, George Floyd’s murder, Black Lives Matter, the Election, Election Deniers, the January 6 Insurrection, guns, Roe v. Wade. In Friday’s *New York Times*, David Brooks says, “We live in an age of menace.”² That’s a strong way of putting the point, but I don’t think he’s wrong.

How do we speak ‘Peace’ to each other in an age of menace? I don’t think there’s ever been a time when it’s been harder for American pastors to keep their flocks together.

“How do we speak
‘Peace’ to each
other in an age of
menace? I don’t
think there’s ever
been a time when
it’s been harder for
American pastors
to keep their
flocks together.”

Some parishioners leave because the pastor talks about politics too much, and others leave because he doesn’t talk about the issues enough. Some ministers have lost their jobs because they prayed for immigrants.

Two years ago not long before the Presidential Election, a few of these pastors who can’t keep their flocks together started organizing church groups where red

and blue Christians gather in a room and explain why they hold their respective convictions. They call it The Colossians Forum, which is named for Colossians 1:17: “For Christ is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Hold together.

When these groups were beginning, a friend invited me to start a Colossians Forum Group right here, and his call must have come at a bad time for me because even without thinking about it, I said, “Bruce, can I just have a root canal instead? That sounds like the fifth circle of hell.” So we don’t have a Colossians Forum here at Kenilworth Union. What do you think?

Janet Adamy wrote a wonderful article for *The Wall Street Journal* about one such Colossians Forum at

a Dutch Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.³ That’s the denomination and the town I was raised in. Janet Adamy, by the way, graduated from the University of Michigan, and now teaches journalism at the Medill School at Northwestern.

In this church in West Michigan, 14 people gathered in a room for several weeks to talk. Eight of them voted for Joe Biden, five for Donald Trump, and one of them was Canadian so he couldn’t vote.

¹ Liv Larson Andrews, “Shake It Off,” *The Christian Century*, July 1, 2022.

² David Brooks, “Why is Pelosi Supporting the Trumpists?” *The New York Times*, July 1, 2022.

³ Janet Adamy, “Abortion, Guns, and Trump: A Church Group Tries to Navigate America’s Divisions,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2020.

One member of the group said he couldn't see how any Christian could possibly vote for a pro-choice candidate; abortion was a deal-killer for him. But the congregation's Associate Pastor was there. She finally gathered all the courage she could find and shared that she became pregnant at the age of 20 and seriously considered an abortion. She said, "I was single. I had no plan. I felt like my life was over." She ended up carrying the child and giving him up for adoption, but she said it was Planned Parenthood who was most helpful and coached her through the whole process.

Fourteen people. By the end of it all, not one of them changed his mind. But they met each other as human beings and fellow disciples of Christ, who holds all things together. They spoke "Peace" to each other, but if their version of peace was not accepted by another, they just shook it off. We speak "Peace" to each other, not disdain. We remember that cherished Presbyterian conviction: "People of good conscience may differ."

My friend Steve McConnell is Senior Minister at The Church of the Palms in Sarasota. He once told them in a sermon that when he was growing up in Michigan during the Vietnam War, a young man from his congregation was killed in the war.

At the cemetery an American flag draped the young man's coffin before it was lowered into the earth. The Honor Guard presented the flag to Ed, the young man's father, who proudly displayed the flag in his home, in its meticulous, folded triangle under glass.

A few years later, President Ford declared a limited pardon for those who'd fled the country to avoid the draft. This gesture deeply offended Ed, whose son had not escaped the draft. He packed up the flag and mailed it to the White House.

A week later, the White House called and invited Ed to meet with the President. Ed went. When the President entered the room, he was carrying the flag under his arm. President Ford told Ed how troubled he was to receive this flag but understood the father's disappointment.

President Ford said, "I'm a father too, but I'm also the Commander in Chief, and I'm trying to heal the nation's divisions. To forgive one son is not to take honor from another. So would you please take this flag back from a grateful nation?" Ed took the flag, and now it's back on his living room wall.⁴

These two men just sat down across from each other and talked for a few minutes—citizen to citizen, veteran to veteran, father to father. The people we disagree with are like that too—citizens, fathers, mothers, sometimes veterans.

So don't do it alone; join a congregation of at least 70. Speak peace. Shake it off.

When the Mission of the Seventy return ebullient at their great success. Jesus rejoices with them and says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

In other words, because you are preaching the kingdom, the land of darkness and distress and death is plummeting and dying. It's just a matter of time.

*"We speak "Peace"
to each other,
not disdain.
We remember
that cherished
Presbyterian
conviction: "People
of good conscience
may differ."*

⁴ Stephen D. McConnell, "If Stones Could Talk," a sermon at Church of the Palms, Sarasota, Florida, May 26, 2019.

—The Great Prayer—
The Reverend Dr. Katie Snipes Lancaster

Living God, friend of the world, mighty one,
We turn to you today, unshaken by doubt,
Your mercy unwavering.
You are beloved, our home and our rock.
Even as you dwell in hidden places,
We are lifted up by the knowledge of your presence.

On the days when we can only see as if through a glass darkly, we know that you hold us in trust, and lead us through the fog, our guide, the one to whom we confide our troubles.

On this Independence Day, we ask that you hold our nation under your sheltering wing.

You are protector of the poor, guardian of the orphans, the one who loves.

We pray for those who are unemployed and under employed, who find their way with coin cup and hand written sign to street corners in hope of the kindness of strangers, and equally we pray for those whose suffering remains hidden and beyond the public eye.

We pray for the places of power, where decisions are made.

You are our liberator God and we need your liberating guidance in the rooms where the determination of some means injustice for others.

You are sovereign over all the earth, the one who mothers the world into birth, the one in whom we find life:

We pray for this planet, for the ways in which human actions destroy. Place in our midst the possibility that such destruction may be ended, prevented, sustainably stopped.

Be with the birds, fish, creatures of the earth, microorganisms. On this Communion Sunday we ask that you abide in even the fruits and grains that give sustenance to all. You are our source and future, O God.

Protect us from ourselves. You are bread of life. Feed us. You are living water. Nourish us.

Turn us now to this table. Accompany us, O Christ. Today, transform us and these familiar things—bread and cup—in the same way you continually transform the world around us.

Bless bread and cup, wheat and grape, farmer and harvest, seed and sower. So that in sharing these simple elements, we might taste and see your goodness, and glimpse what it is to be in communion with you and with one another.

Through Christ, in Christ, with Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, most holy God, now and forever. Amen.