

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost: July 6, 2025
“Missionaries”

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost. Today our Gospel has us witness Jesus sending out “missionaries,” so to speak, to places he intended to visit at some time.

Now the first thing to notice is that Jesus is sending these people out “in his name.” This is the answer to the question in Matthew, “when did I see you naked, hungry, in prison, etc.” and the answer is whatever you did or did not do to the least of me – basically you have done or not done in hospitality to Jesus.

So, we could get into the whole study of this, but instead, I would like to tell you the story of Pat and Roy, the first Episcopalians I ever met. We often feel witnessing or being a missionary is something difficult, however, this couple were being disciples and missionaries just by being themselves.

When I came to California it was to take a job training horses. However, what had been presented and promised turned out to be quite different and I had no family out here. It happened that one of my training clients was a couple, Pat and her husband, Roy. One day in the barn Pat, Roy and I were talking and they asked me what was important to me now, as they had seen that my job and living arrangements were precarious.

So, I thought about it for a minute and stated that now I wanted to focus on my spiritual self and go to church. I was, after all, in the middle of a custody battle, feeling homesick, and lonely. So, Pat and Roy agreed to pick me up on Sunday and take me to their church: St Stephen’s in the Field, San Jose.

Well, I had never heard of an Episcopal Church, but it just felt right. Everyone was so welcoming, and Pat and Roy picked me up every Sunday after that. About six months later they invited me to Cursillo, a faith deepening weekend of faith, prayer and hospitality. Funny thing about Cursillo is, someone can sponsor you – and not really tell you where or why or even what will happen. So, surprise! It was a wonderful weekend that changed my life.

Pat and Roy never preached at me. Instead they became the Christian model to me. They said less and did more. But now I also realize that me - that 30 something, divorced, homesick woman, was in a way for them, Jesus. Little did I know that at that time I was the least of these.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and he continually invites us to walk with him. His words here speak to every generation of Christian disciples and inspire a sense of urgency about bringing God's realm near. And what is God's kingdom? Well, I would describe it as a sort of peace that God is with you no matter what.

When sending out these missionaries, notice that Jesus does not tell them to do any sort of assessment before proclaiming Christ's peace. He doesn't ask them to determine whether this house follows the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or whether that house has kept the law, or whether another house is likely to receive the good news Jesus brings. Jesus doesn't ask them to do a risk assessment or pre-judge whether a house will be worth their time.

Which then means Jesus assumes that these apostles he sends out, do in fact have peace. Jesus says that "Your peace" specifically, not just random, generic peace, will rest on others or return to you. I can honestly say, Pat and Roy had peace, which is why I continued to go to church with them. It was why I was open to participate in a weekend retreat.

As we engage others, we must first be well-grounded in God's peace, the peace that passes understanding. God's shalom is more than being calm. It is confidence in God's abiding presence so that we also share that presence with others. Engaging others means not treating them as objects upon which we act, but as sacred others with whom we are called to be fully and peacefully present. If they do not share this peace, Jesus does not advise reactivity, scorn or shame. Instead, he reassures his followers that their own peace will not be diminished and cannot be taken away from them as he states, "it will return to you"

Jesus also does not instruct them to argue, convince, or threaten if they are not welcomed. He does advise them to signal their moving on by shaking dust off their shoes. In this way, they are not weighed down by rejection, or paralyzed with trying to figure out what they did wrong or could have done differently to produce a different outcome. Instead, Jesus invites them to move forward in the confidence of these two proclamations, "Peace to this house!" and "The kingdom of God has come near."

As followers of Jesus, we can reliably root our lives in these two proclamations — “Peace to this house!” and “The kingdom of God has come near.” This is the good news that we have to share! These keep our gaze on God’s activity right in front of us, rather than turning it to blaming, accusing or judgmental analyzing, symptoms and a reactivity that can hold our lives in bondage.

As for Pat and Roy, I learned I was not the only stranger befriended and brought to church. Over the years they introduced me to many with a similar story. It was that peace they could bring to me during my troubled time, a peace that only their faith could provide.

And, as for the rest of the story, after that Cursillo weekend, I began a very long journey to the priesthood. And this fall I will return the favor by participating as the Spiritual leader for a weekend in Chico.

And just as Jesus sends his people to work and live as his witness, he tells them to start—and perhaps be in continuous—prayer. Jesus tells them to ask God for laborers, the very thing the people he is speaking to *are*! They are to ask for more to join in the good that they are doing. I wonder if the prayer request serves another purpose: as they go through the hardships that will inevitably come, as they pray for workers, they will be reminded that they themselves are the answer to that very same prayer to someone else. The practice of praying for workers will continually re-establish their call.

This summer our world is called into even more uncertainty. Consider today’s Gospel your recommitment to praying for the struggling world, for showing God’s grace to each other, and for modeling a true faith in following Jesus. Consider this Gospel your call to invite another, maybe someone who, like me, was in a spiritual vacuum. You could be their Pat and Roy, getting them started with a faith community. Consider this Gospel your call to model the peace that you find in your faith.

Maybe this is the time to offer your gifts of time, talent and financial assistance to keep our community of faith going. If you have pledged, thank you. I say that knowing that collectively we can do more than when we are alone. Our church on Sunday needs to be the place to nourish you to go out and share your faith and peace to the struggling world around you. Go forth in the name of Jesus. Amen