

Sermon  
Fourth Sunday After Pentecost  
Sunday, July 6th, 2025  
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa  
The Reverend Victoria Scott  
Readings: 2 KINGS 5:1-14; PSALM 30; GALATIANS 6:(1-6) 7-16; LUKE 10:1-11,  
16-20

One of the first road trips my husband Randy and I took together was to PEI. This was before the days of GPS and Google Maps and cell phones, and we had an old fashioned, paper, fold out map to chart our way. At this stage in our relationship I'd not yet fully disclosed the true extent of my spatial and geographical disorientation with Randy. I really struggle with maps: it's all random lines and shapes to me, and North is never where I think it should be! Not knowing this, he handed me the map at a crucial point on the journey and said "Can you make sure we're heading toward Hwy 2?" Remember, we were on the way to PEI. Not wanting to admit my challenges with maps, I unfolded it, and stared at that page with everything I had in me, desperate to see what I needed to see. Wondering at my silence, Randy looked over, glanced down at the map and exclaimed "Oh, for goodness sake, that's Newfoundland!" He flipped the map over: PEI and New Brunswick were on the other side...

In the Gospel passage we've just heard, Jesus gives the disciples the closest they ever get to a map for their ministry. In telling them to go and proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God has come near, he provides a rough chart of the landscape they will venture into. He tells them of the hazards of the terrain, how to navigate both hospitality and hatred. He gives them authority to chart a path of healing, and restoration.

In spite of my struggle with maps, I do still love them. I love that the lines and paths will show the way if properly read - the idea that if studied long enough, a piece of paper will show the way to our destination is deeply appealing!

This isn't the kind of map that Jesus offers us, though. Yes, Scripture, the Gospels, provide a map of sorts, but only when we bring what's on the page to life with our own words and actions. We won't find the way by staring at the page.

We'll find the way when we encounter God's loving word to us with open eyes and hearts and minds to others and to the world around us.

The number seventy is often used symbolically in the Bible to denote completeness, fullness, and universality. For example: the 70 elders appointed by Moses (Num 11:16-17), the 70 nations descended from Noah (Gen 10), and the 70 members of Jacob's family who went to Egypt (Ex 1:5). It's significant, then, that the number of people we hear that Jesus sent out is 70: it infuses this passage with this symbolism of completeness, of fullness, of wholeness.

There is an African proverb that says this: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

This is at the heart of the message in this Gospel passage! The 70 go out in pairs. They begin from a place of connection, and they invite others into connection. The 70 return with joy, having found wholeness through connection!

There is wholeness found in recognizing connections in the world and living into them. It's not just the 70 who are invited into that: it's us, it's everyone. The 70 Jesus sent out offer a peace that is found in recognizing that the way to wholeness is connection. When that peace is rejected, it isn't personal. It's a rejection of connection found in living in relationship with God, and living out that relationship in the world, joining with God's mission, already ongoing around us.

We are suffering from the rampant individualism that has overtaken our world. This individualism has created (and continues to create) fractures and brokenness. It makes peace hard to find. It makes it difficult to see the way forward. It makes us feel that we are in uncharted territory much of the time!

You might be familiar with the South African word "Ubuntu". It means my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours. Archbishop Desmond Tutu described it as this: "...we belong in a bundle of life. We say 'a person is a person through other people.' It is not 'I think therefore I am.' It's 'I am human because I belong.'"

God is always and forever inviting us to see and feel the “bundle of life” to which we belong! We are forever invited into this interconnectedness, and it’s not found on a page: it is found in looking into the eyes of another; it’s found in extending a hand in love. It’s found in seeing and feeling God’s presence everywhere. It’s found in opening our eyes and hearts to the movement of the Spirit, already at work all around us. It’s found in joining hands, and making the journey together.

Author and poet Jan Richardson has wonderful things to say about maps. She says this: “...we come into the world with a scrap, a shred of some cosmic map in our grasp. It’s lined onto the palms of our hands that emerged with us, fisted, from our mother’s ocean. There are days when I believe that if we touch enough hands, place them side by side, we’ll finally see the map. Across the landscape of our palms, across the terrain of our hands that come in different sizes and colors and have wrinkles or scars and are smooth or leathery with work and are missing fingers or are twisted with illness, across their flesh lie the lines that if we look closely enough are connected and will tell us which way to go.”

Jesus invited those who travelled with him to make a new map: a map that took into account the rocky terrain of disconnection and injustice, of pain and hunger, and imagined another way found through hands and hearts joined in love and solidarity! A way of interconnection, and peace, and wholeness.

May hands and hearts joined together in this blessed community here at Ascension continue to show us the way forward, and may we walk a path of peace and connection today and every day, in Jesus name. Amen.