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Proper 9 C (Luke 10:1-11, 16-20)
St. Thomas Episcopal Church, McLean, VA

My daughter takes off on a choir trip to England tonight, which means I'll head out to Dulles airport. It's a place to launch adventures. As I watch her head out on her first big one, I think back to mine—study abroad, seeing friends in the Peace Corps, a trip to visit churches in Asia. Whenever I go to the airport, I see people with backpacks headed off to big things. I know I will come home a little deflated. The big adventures, the big accomplishments happen out there. I'm just hanging out right here.

Our gospel feels a little bit the same way to me. Off go seventy missionaries, ready to pave the way for Jesus. They are out on big adventures in new places, precursors of the missionaries that the church would one day send to the far corners of the globe. The big accomplishments of missionary work happen out there. But I can't really go out there. I'm hanging out right here. So it doesn't feel like Jesus has a lot for me to do.

I think my spiritual imagination may have gotten a bit small. Because when I go back and listen to this text more carefully, it becomes clear that the airport or the road—that those things are incidental to the adventure Jesus is talking about. When I think about the kind of missionary work that he's really asking for, it's something that not only can but maybe needs to happen right here.

To start with, there's actually not a lot of traveling. There's just a lot of hanging out. These disciples may head off down the road, but they don't move fast. "Remain in the same house . . . Do not move about from house to house." There's something very necessary about letting community grow up a little around these travelers. For all the ministry of traveling, there's also a ministry of staying put.

And what the seventy do in these new places—well, that's actually pretty unremarkable, too. Once again, they kind of just hang out. They stick around for dinner. "Eat what is set before you": They don't get to be picky. And when they do things, it's really nothing magical. There's a reference in there to curing people, but it sounds like they spend a lot of time talking. They proclaim peace. They have conversations about the nearness of God's kingdom. They don't really do or teach anything *new*. They don't talk about what will happen or even what might happen. They just notice what is already there—peace, blessing—and they name it.

None of this is particularly spectacular. But it does something very necessary: it prepares the way for Jesus. These places, after all, are the places Jesus plans to go visit. And so this ministry of hanging out and talking and naming does something that Jesus needs. It cultivates open and attentive hearts. And I find this such a relief, when I think about my own attempts to do what Jesus wants: this advance team doesn't have to do all the work. They don't have to make the miracles happen. That's God's job. But those who prepare the way for Jesus are the vanguard

of hope, as I heard them once named. They are the people who wake us up to a different way of being in this world than what we are used to.

Again, not spectacular. The work of hope is not always something that comes with accolades or even the excitement of a trip to the airport. A lot of time, it produces few visible results or quantifiable accomplishments. Rarely does someone write home about the words that made something shift inside, or that conversation that gave them enough energy to try again. But it is such words and such conversations that sustain most of us, day in and day out, that shape our choices and our capacities.

Think about those people who have reminded you that there is a different way of being. They are the people who make a difference not only by what they do but who they are and how they are with us. They are those people who have a keen sense of the kingdom of God and who insist on its legitimacy. They are the people who hold the hope of Jesus up in both personal and public lives that would otherwise be ruled by a different and more expedient logic. They are the people who remind us that the way things are is not the way they have to be.

I want to be one of those people. And I think, when I read this gospel, that I can be. So can you. This is what Jesus invites his friends to do.

I invite you to think about how you can engage in this work, not in some future, abstract time, but in this time, this week, right in the life you are living. Peace be to this house. The kingdom of God has come near to you. How can you express those things in ways that make sense to you and the people around you?

Imagine what lies ahead of you this week—the appointments, the chores, the meetings, the errands, all of it. And imagine what it would be like to be truly present to all the little communities of life where you find yourself. And then, to say, peace be with you. Or maybe, it's going to be OK. Or maybe, I feel a sense of rightness being with you. Or, I hope your heart isn't troubled. Or perhaps you need to say, the kingdom of God has come near to you. Which might be saying, I feel God's presence with us in this time, this task, this choice. I don't think we have to be afraid about this decision. I think the world can become a better place.

My words sound like me. But your words should sound like you. That's what Jesus asks for. See if you can say the words you need—maybe try for just once a day in each of the six days ahead of you.

And then see what happens in your life and the lives of the people with whom you are connected. What wakes up? What do you become alert to? Is there more hope? What becomes possible when you are looking forward? How is Jesus being invited in?

Go your way, my brothers and sisters. But don't go too far if you don't have to. Jesus needs your voice in your own life where you are.