

Letting-Go of the Excess Baggage

[Text - Luke 10:1-12]

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The word “Gospel” means “good news”. It derives from the Greek word, *euaggelion* - where we also get the word “evangelism.” To evangelize, is to proclaim the Gospel; to bring *good* news to our troubled and hurting world. At least that’s what it originally meant. Unfortunately, this word of Good News has, at times, been overshadowed and corrupted by the proclamation of *bad* news. Many people today, when they hear the word “evangelist”, don’t necessarily get a warm or positive feeling. That’s because so many so-called “evangelists” are extremely cold in their approach and negative in their message. They act as if their only purpose is to prepare people to - some day - make it to heaven. And apparently, the only way to get them ready for heaven, is to scare the hell out of them! Fortunately, this is not the message, or method, of Jesus Christ.

Jesus speaks about experiencing the Divine Realm in the Present Moment, declaring that “The Realm of God is at hand!” And Jesus reveals that Realm’s genuine presence through his acts of kindness and compassion, healing and grace. As Joseph Grizone writes in our Continuing Testament, “Jesus never bullied or used oppressive tactics to force people into submission.” In this morning's New Testament Reading, as Jesus sends out seventy messengers with the *Good News*, he gives them specific instructions on what to take, and what to do. Those who are sent are told to travel light, to carry no purse, or bag or extra pair of sandals. This indicates that those who carry-forth the Good News, can’t be bogged-down with a lot of extra baggage!

Rather than carrying a heavy load of condemnation and judgment, Jesus tells his followers to carry the uplifting gift of Divine peace and wholeness. He says, ‘Whatever house you enter, the first thing you say is, *peace be to this house*. And if anyone is there shares that peaceful spirit, your peace will rest upon that person.’ A true *evangelist* carries within a spirit of peace and wholeness; and strives

to connect-with and tap-into the peace and wholeness of others. It is *not* an evangelist's job to stir-up fear or anxiety, shame, or strife; because there's plenty of that in this world already.

Jesus says that those who seek to proclaim the Word of the Holy One should start with a word of Peace [or, in Hebrew, *Shalom* - which means peace, wholeness and well-being.] And then, *wherever* that Shalom is welcomed, God's messengers will work to bring-about healing, restoration, and reconciliation. Now that may sound like a pretty tall order; yet this is the crucial work to which Jesus calls us all. As an Open-and-Affirming Family of Faith, you and I work together to provide welcome and warmth, food and resources, energy and advocacy that gives hope and help to people who are hurting and struggling. And sometimes, all it takes is the care and concern of one person to begin the healing process. Someone who cares enough to ask, "How are you doing?" Someone who cares enough to *really listen* to the answer, and to provide a supportive and positive Presence.

Jesus says, begin with a *word* of peace, and then get involved with the *work* of healing, restoration, and reconciliation. For when we do this, people around us will know that a Divine Realm is at hand! A Divine Realm that is recognizable by its tangible Spirit of peace and compassion, healing and grace. Preachers of Doom & Gloom like to point to the *problems* of this world – hurricanes and hatred, war and violence, disease and destruction - as the sign of God's coming Realm. Yet as Jesus reminds us, there's always been war and violence, trouble and turmoil on this planet. The True Sign of the Coming - and Present - Divine Realm, is not a threatening cloud of evil; but rather, the inspiring Light of peace and hope, wholeness and love which Christ's true messengers shine-forth! And if people choose not to receive this message of Good News, Jesus tells us to simply shake the dust off our shoes and keep-on going! There's definitely no need to judge or condemn those who don't welcome the Divine Realm; because rejecting it brings-about its own consequences. Turning away from an opportunity to receive Divine peace and wholeness, is certainly punishment enough. And if we truly believe in the power of Divine Love to change the world, then we'll trust that

those seeds of compassion and hope that we've planted, will eventually take root and grow!

"The Harvest is Plentiful!" Jesus declares. There are all kinds of people just waiting to hear and experience the *Good News*; which is why it's so important that you and I reclaim the genuine meaning of the word - and the work - of an *evangelist*. That's also why we warmly welcome *all* people to this inclusive Family of Faith. But more than just welcoming people *here*, you and I are called go-forth into the world - a world of pain and trouble, heartache and *bad* news. Yet we go from here with a message of tremendously *Good News*, as true *evangelists* - carrying with us, and within us a Divine Spirit of peace and wholeness, love and grace. So, to borrow a phrase from Jesus, let's shake-off the dust, and keep-on going!