

July 3, 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Isaiah 66:10-14; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

by [Susan Kendall](#) in the [June 22, 2016](#) issue

Not just 12, but 70. Luke multiplies the other Gospel narratives' number of disciples: 70 of them, two by two. Jesus sends them ahead to prepare the way, to find a meeting place, to do logistics, to plan and listen and share over food and drink. To make a way when it seems there is no way to bring hope, peace, stability, and a future.

Jesus says he is sending them out "like lambs into the midst of wolves." We live in a time of constant news and information. Intimacy is erased, privacy laughable, rhetoric rude and rusty. In such a context, the notion of going out as lambs to wolves seems apt, even if the wolves and lambs themselves may be interchangeable.

Yet Luke's message is one of peace and opportunity—because, as the 70 are to proclaim, the kingdom or realm of God is near. All people everywhere are to hear this news, this story that echoes an inclusive priority: God speaks to all people, invites all people. No one is to be left out of hearing this news about the gift of life.

This isn't, however, a campaign or a marketing strategy. The point is to be with other people. The first priority is people themselves, not information to be shared. Hospitality is central to the Lucan report: "Eat what is set before you." Fred Craddock writes simply that food was a critical issue in the spread of the gospel.

And so it remains. I travel a lot and spend countless hours in airports. When a flight is late, my agenda is delayed and I am stuck, as are those around me. We sigh and mutter and search for plugs to keep our technology working. Food becomes a source of comfort—and an opportunity to strike up conversation. Rather than hunker down and isolate ourselves in frustration and angst, we are blessed to meet people from all over the world. We can even share concerns, hopes, and dreams; we can say more than just what we do and where we live.

It is a reminder of the ongoing tone of our time, perhaps of every time and place: eschatology. What will the future be? And how single-minded should we be about that? Twitter feed notwithstanding, or late flights that scramble our carefully crafted schedules.

Travel light; take little with you; pay attention to the people in your path; proclaim the kingdom of God. Here is the sticky part: What is it to proclaim such a message? N. T. Wright suggests that it calls us in this present moment to a deeper authenticity in how we live. We are to engage in community, in that which brings justice, in doing the work of the gospel—not because it will all be over soon, but because doing so allows for life in the here and now. The gospel compels us to a life motivated by grace and love as gift.

The 70 are motivated by their deep knowledge and experience of this love and grace. We too are offered a chance to begin again, to receive forgiveness. While it's tempting to seek an easy triumphalism, we can find instead in Luke's narrative the source of all that is and will be. We then participate in the living faith with meaning and purpose, in community.

People seek meaning, community, purpose, a source for engaging the world as willing participants in it. Every generation wants this. We talk a lot about young adults, what choices they will make and why. It is too easy to spend life looking at data, lamenting a past, delaying decisions. But in every generation we face difficult choices, have moments of uneasy peace, and wonder about our mistakes and failures. As this week's passage from Isaiah indicates, restoration is an ongoing pattern of the human condition. And the text from Luke is for all generations in their hardships, quandaries, and injustices. The story of the 70 reminds us of God's overarching purpose and presence.

Discourse analysis reminds us that all talk and descriptions of the world are by definition partial. We can't capture the whole of life in word or action. None of us is able to make perfect decisions that result in perfect outcomes. And our efforts to identify God's purpose and presence will fall short as well.

This is a hard truth to accept, but it does not negate the gospel. Sometimes we project our certainty of belief onto the outcomes of our work. But faith orients us not for success as much as for authenticity. The 70 return with joy and are reminded: this is not a joy based on successful outcomes. It is a joy rooted in faith, in an orientation toward living a kingdom life now on earth as it is in heaven.