

Luke 10:1-12

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near." I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

**“Going Forth on the Fourth”
Rev. Charles Schuster
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It's in Garth Stein's book, *The Art of Racing in the Rain*. It's the Fort Collins book that we're going to read this summer. It's the book review we had this past Wednesday. Enzo is a dog. He's contemplating his lineage, and he says, "I never knew my father. I was told he was a shepherd-poodle mix. People say that shepherds and poodles are smart dogs, and therefore more valuable. That's all junk. Everybody knows that shepherds and poodles aren't especially smart. They are responders and reactors, and not independent thinkers. People make such a fuss over them when they catch a frisbee. Oh, they are clever and quick, but they just can't think outside the box. Who wants to be a shepherd or a poodle? No-one, no-one. It is unusual, it happens, it has happened in the past and it will happen in the future."

The fourth of July on a Sunday that brings together two important allegiances, our citizenship and our Christianity. How we revere our country, and how we express our faith. If we are patriots who see nothing higher than our nation, we lapse into a nationalistic chauvinism that is without soul. When our religion is sublimated by our national flair, our faith holds its belief in the nation as its god, the nation becomes our idol and we become fanatics.

On the other hand, if we lift up our Christianity without taking into account our patriotic gratitude, we become indifferent to the blessings that come from living in this place, and insensitive to those who have given their lives to see to it that we can. So this morning, we have to look at what it means to be a patriotic American and what it means to be a professing Christian. This morning, on the fourth of July, which is on a Sunday, three questions. Three aspects of our being. Not for shepherds or poodles.

First of all, what it means to be human. What does it mean to be human? To be human is to have a passion for the problem. When we see it, we have to say it. To be human is to speak out. This year in Vacation Bible School, they asked the pastors to do short meditations with the children each morning before the children went off to their classes. They had never done that before. Probably won't be doing it again. I got the assignment for the last day. The theme for the week was the rain forest, the jungle theme. If you came through the door from the south entrance of the church, you would walk through what looked like a jungle scene. You would have seen jungle animals. A stuffed monkey, a plastic spider, some rubber snakes, and you would have heard jungle noises as you came in.

The meditations that we were asked to do were to set the stage for the children as they prepared to go to their lessons. I think they were supposed to be calming and quiet. I have a hat that looks like what Indiana Jones wears in the movies, and some have said (truthfully, no one has ever said), but you might say, with that hat on, I bear a resemblance to Harrison Ford. We're both Caucasian, and we're both male. So I put on the hat, and I tied this rubber snake to my back with a string. After being introduced, I came out from behind that wall back there into the sanctuary, asking the children to be very still. I said that we had borrowed a very rare and valuable snake from the zoo, and that we had to put a large deposit down, and the snake had escaped, and the snake was last seen in the sanctuary. Now, it was a friendly snake. It wouldn't hurt anybody. So I came in looking for the snake, and I looked under the pulpit, because often snakes like to hide in pulpits. And then I went over to the choir loft. Sometimes you'll find them there. The children are absolutely still, frozen in their seats, and then I walked out into the sanctuary into where the pews are where the kids are, and I turned this way, and the kids on this side saw the snake, and began yelling and screaming, "It's on your back! It's on your back!" So I turned this way, and of course this group now on this side, they begin screaming. "It's on your back, you idiot, don't you know it's crawling up your neck?"

You talk about 150, 200 kids, wild, on a Friday in church, passion for the problem they were so loud, I hope they never lose that. It's a human thing. I think of those words of the Revolution - "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country." "Give me liberty or give me death." "If this be treason, let's make the most of it." "Taxation without representation is tyranny." Passion for the problem, it's a human thing. It is. I hope our children never lose it. I hope we all can keep it. When something's wrong, we say it. In the Sixties, there were marchers in the street because there was a passion for the problem. The problem was racism and war. In the 1770s, there was a tea party in the harbor in Boston, and now there's a protest of tea party standing up for spending and debt creation. Passion for the problem. You may not have agreed with what happened in the Sixties. Or you may have. Or you may not agree with the tea parties today, but that's our country - speaking out.

Martin Luther spoke out with a passion for the problem when he nailed 95 points of contention on the door of the church in Wittenberg. And Jesus stood up to the Pharisees in a protest. He said they had turned religion into a form of faith without the content. He said the lawyers are like whitewashed tombstones. He said Herod's like a snake or a fox.

It's a human thing to speak it. A passion for the problem, to say it. Reminds me of a couple traveling through the mountains and they stopped at a place called Echo Point. And she said to him, as they stood looking over the wall of mountains and the valley between, "Try it," she said. He said, "I think it's silly." "Try it," she said, and so he yelled out, "Baloney." Nothing. She said, "Try it again." He said, "Okay, but it won't work." And then he yelled out, "We are the best-looking couple in America." And the mountain shouted back, "Baloney."

Even the universe has a voice and says it. We are protesters. We are - Protestants. And every now and then, we have a passion for the problem, and we say it. "Baloney." It's a natural thing. It's an obvious thing. And sometimes it's an absolutely courageous thing. It's important to note it, and to say it, especially today, when the fourth of July is on the Sabbath. But we are more than just human. We are patriotic people. And if all we do is protest, our talk will sound like what they said of Warren Harding's speeches, that they have the impression of an army of pompous phrases moving over a landscape in search of an idea. Just saying it can't be the end of it. Say the patriotic thing. As people with a passion for the problem, we are patriots, true patriots. True patriots have a prescription for the possible. It's not just simply saying it. It's about doing something to make it right. There's organization to our passion. Jesus appointed seventy. He sent them out. He said the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. You are lambs being sent out in the midst of wolves.

When there's a problem, we find the prescription to fix it. That is, if we are a patriot. Because we are a nation of do-ers, of organizers. Always, there's something that can be done when realize what is happening, when we see what's going on, as there was on that day in September when they knew their plane was being used as a bomb headed for the nation's capitol. Todd Beamer and others said, "Let's roll." When they cleared the island and it was safe and the war was beginning to turn, someone said "Let's raise the flag," and they did, on Iwo Jima. Patriots are people who have a passion for the problem and a prescription for the possible. Always, there is something to be done. Always.

Paul Harvey tells a story. It's announced, a passenger jet, the captain said "There's a warning light on the thermal expander valve on the Number 2 engine and I will not fly this plane until it's replaced. Would you please return to the waiting room. The passengers were off the plane. Ten minutes later they were ushered back on. A passenger from Minnesota asked the flight attendant, "Did they get the new thermal expander valve installed in that length of time?" and flight attendant said, "Gosh, no, there's not one of those things in a thousand miles. What we got was a new pilot."

Sometimes we make do. We make the most of it. There is a calendar. David Eggnar found it. Every day you turn the page on this calendar and it's 365 of the stupidest things ever written. One day, a quote, and it was April 1st, and it warned, "If you bought our course on how to fly in six easy lessons, we apologize for any inconvenience caused by us. We regret having failed to include the last chapter. If you would please send your name and address we will provide the last chapter, which is entitled "How to Land Your Plane Safely."

Charles Kuralt in his book *A Life on the Road*, he met an old man in Kansas, never did catch his name, he was a pilot. Kuralt was doing a story on this artist whose canvas was 80-acre fields and the best place to see it was from the air, so the old farmer agreed to take him up in his J2 Piper Cub. They were flying 200 feet off the ground, and that's when the question came out, "How long ago did you get your pilot's license, old fella?" "Well, I don't have a pilot's license," he said. "You know, the truth is, I found this old thing wrecked out there in my field and I patched it up and taught myself to fly it." See, that's what we do, as Americans. We have a prescription for the possible, we just do it. We learn how to do it, and we get 'er done, as they say. It isn't easy. Sometimes there aren't rules or guidelines, but a patriot is a problem-solver, working on things to make the world better.

Fantasia Barrino is one of the American Idol winners, and she said, "One night a 70-year-old woman came up to me. I was in the Broadway show *The Color Purple*. And she said that she too had been a single mom who had dropped out of school. At age 70 she was now taking nursing classes. And Fantasia said, "That woman inspired me. You can't tell me that dreams don't come true, because my life and her life are proof they do." The spirit of the patriot. It's Abraham Lincoln who said, "We can hold this union together in spite of the war." It's Dotty Metcalf who said, "I want to be an astronaut," and she grew up in our church. It's Eleanor Yates who said, "I want to paint murals on walls that show people getting along." The painter of our mural here, who grew up in the church. It's Condoleezza Rice who said, "I grew up in a family whose belief was that you can do it, but you have to work really hard to get it." And Rosa Parks who said, "I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, that diminishes fear, because knowing what must be done, does away with fear." Or Eleanor Roosevelt who said, "You must do the thing that you think you cannot do."

Patriots have courage to act. They're people with a plan, and they carry it out, and they work hard, and they organize because you see, they have the prescription for the possible. The patriotic American. The patriot is the one who will step up and repair the leaking well, not the folks that are finding fault with why it broke. The patriot is the one who can see the big picture in our economic problems and work to solve them. Not the pundits and the politicians who stand on the fence, squawking like crows, waiting and yelling for the rain to come. We are people who protest, because we have a passion for the problem, and we are patriots who have a prescription for the possible, and we organize. And we just do it. And on the fourth of July, on this Sabbath day, we are professing Christians. We know Sabbath. We know sacrament.

Someone asked a dour-faced old Methodist preacher if it's okay to watch a baseball game on the Sabbath. And can you believe, that old pastor answered, "It's all right, I guess, if you don't enjoy it." How twisted is that? Sabbath and sacrament are to be enjoyed because they help remind us who we are. It is no surprise that one of the last things Jesus did before his death on the cross, one of the last things he did was a religious act. It was Sabbath, it was Passover, it was sacrament. He brought his friends together. And he did that so they could remind themselves and he could remind himself who they are.

You know, when I spoke to the children during Vacation Bible School, when I brought in the rubber snake and tied it to my back and got them to get into a high state of excitement, I tried to say something to them. It's possible that they didn't hear it, but what I tried to say was, "You know, the most important things in life are those things that sometimes we never see, or sometimes we forget we have, and the reason we do is because they're too close to us. And sometimes what we have to do to be able to see them is to turn around. And sometimes we have to have our friends point out to us that they're there. Sabbath for us is a time to find peace and be reminded what we have.

Jim Mayer discovered it. 1969, he stepped on a mine in a rice paddy in Vietnam. He heard the click, he heard the boom, he heard the call for the medic, the tourniquets, the morphine. He remembers the chopper ride to the hospital. He lost both of his legs. Someone asked him, "What are you going to do after you get home?" And Mayer answered, "I'm going to have a party every year on the day I was blown up. I'm going to have a party that I'm going to call it's my "I'm alive" day. It will be an Alive Day party, not a birthday party. An Alive Day party. And the first of those was in his home town, and it became a tradition, and he became known as the Milkshake Man, because he would go and supply milkshakes to amputees in the hospital, especially those who were injured in the Gulf War. And on his Alive Day recently, it was a steak house, and he raised money to send disabled veterans to the winter sports clinic in Colorado. Jim Mayer would say, "When I got into the Army, what I really wanted to do when I came out was, I wanted to be a traveling salesman and make a good living. But then I got into this thing, and my whole life took a different course. And now I do what I love. If I hadn't been so severely injured, I don't think I would have ever figured out what makes me tick."

Sabbath and sacrament, a time to pause as Christians, what makes us tick? Bill Bardsley once said, "I'm thankful for the alarm that goes off in the morning hours because that means I'm still alive." Then he went on to say, "And I'm thankful for the person behind me in church who sings off-key, because that means I can hear." Or, as one child who wrote a letter to Santa in July who said, "Dear Santa, could you come early this year? I've been really super-good, but I don't know if I can keep it up much longer. Please hurry." Or Jeff Foxworthy who said, "You might be a redneck if your grandmother's asked to leave the bingo game because of her language. You might be a redneck if you come back from the city dump with more than you took." Well, we might be a redneck and we might not make it being good till Christmas, and what makes us tick anyway? It was Myra Mains who said, "For every five well-adjusted and smoothly-functioning Americans, there are two who never had a chance to discover themselves. It may well be that that's because they've never been alone with themselves."

Sunday is a time for us to be alone with ourselves. It's a time to discover who we are, and to get in touch with what makes us tick. Practitioners of faith, finding peace in our lives. Sabbath and sacrament. The first Sunday of the month, it's a time to find peace to be thankful for life, for the freedom that we have, for the opportunities to speak out, and for the encouragement to do it. For the opportunity to thrive, for all the good things and the most important things we're apt to forget because they're so close to us. On this fourth of

July we turn around. People with passion for the problem, patriots with a prescription for the possible, practicing, professing Christians, who know the Sabbath peace. We've got to be speakers and protesters sometime, and we've got to be doers and dreamers sometimes. And we have to be believers and practitioners of peace. Otherwise it's what Garth Stein said, we become like sheepdogs and poodles, not especially smart, mainly responders and reactors who are not independent thinkers, and who cannot think outside the box.