

July 6, 2025  
First Congregational UCC  
Pastor Nick Hatch  
“Written in Heaven”  
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Let us pray:

God, this morning we find ourselves stretched between different forms of sovereignty. Show us the true peace and freedom of your kingdom. Help us to travel lightly and to trust your protection. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, oh our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Amanda and I have an American flag which waves in the wind upon the front of our home. New puppy buyers get a photo next to it! It's very patriotic, and I make sure it's red, white, and blue remains clean to flutter in the wind.

But I have an uneasy relationship with this flag: I rejoice in the freedom, sacrifice and altruism it represents, and I weep with the violence, broken promises and genocide which fill its shadow.

My family has a long history of patriotism. On the wall of my parents' house hangs a Kentucky long rifle. It belonged to my 4<sup>th</sup> great grandfather who rode cavalry in the civil war. A civil war historian verified that its unique construction originated in Indiana around 1850. Its parts were sourced from all over the world - a real haphazard collection - assembled in urgent haste since the Union was desperate for arms. In Gettysburg, my great grandfather carried this rifle. His regiment, suffering heavy violent casualties against all odds, was the first wave of Union Soldiers to break

the enemy line and take a boulder strewn hill known as Devil's Den and disable the confederate artillery located there.

He also rode for Sherman's March, during which the Northern Army swept through the south, ruthlessly applying a scorched earth philosophy to permanently cripple the south's ability to wage war.

And so, when I see that rifle, I also find myself - uneasy with the history it represents; a war to end slavery and the ruthless decimation of an entire people.

To make things even more complicated, I know of my great grandfather's love of neighbors and freedom. It was written in a local paper that he himself, out of desperation for the cause, rode home to home asking all his neighbors and friends for their horses to form his calvary unit. He recruited the riders. He helped to arm them. And he promised that if he lived, he would bring all the living horses home. And at the conclusion of the war - he did. He rode to every home to return their war horses and thanked them for their sacrifices.

Noble. Courageous. The things of legend.

Truly, on this patriotic weekend, many of us find ourselves uneasy, troubled by divisive rhetoric, the marginalization of the poor, and hateful civic discourse. Yet we are people of this complicated nation who through its struggles have brought forth charity, offered great sacrifices, and acted in good faith.

I wonder what Christ's message of hope has to offer these times.

Our scripture falls right in the middle of Pentecost, which is a fitting time for a parable about growing the church through the gift of the Spirit. Jesus chooses, trains, and deploys his disciples into neighboring towns and villages to pave the way for his personal visits and the spreading of the Good News. Jesus's choice to pick seventy disciples mirrors Genesis ten which provides a list of all seventy nations of the world. Jesus meant for salvation, and sovereignty of the gospel, to be for all humankind.

There is a sense of urgent haste in Jesus's plan as he assembled his collection of apostles. Jesus says the laborers for the harvest are few, out of necessity each is bestowed the full measure of Christ's own authority to teach, preach and heal. Against all odds, in the face of Satan, and with the fearful metaphor "Lambs among wolves"- the Apostles are sent out.

Apostles take no things with them: No purse, no bags, no instrument of protection- except their faith, their blessing from God, and power of the Holy Spirit in God's word. Their preparation means a choice for physical poverty and vulnerability: they are to travel lightly and depend upon the hospitality of others. We are to have a nonviolent response to those who do not welcome us. In other words, all our faith-filled preparations subvert the expected preparations of the systems of power and privilege to which we belong.

Sometimes we find ourselves welcome and find a person of peace: Jesus encourages us to dwell there, eat what is given, offer healing and hope-filled words, and through the freedom of relationship and divine intervention proclaim, "The kingdom of Heaven has come near to you."

But Jesus also says: 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.'

Either way; resting easy in gracious welcome or living with uneasy rejection - we are to proclaim the sovereignty of Christ.

Taking Jesus teachings into account, I wonder why would we expect to always feel welcome among the powers and principalities to whom we are subject today?

Why do we expect a cultural or political order in alignment with the peace and freedom of the Gospel of Christ?

Peace and freedom, two words which ring true today both in our Christian faith and our national celebrations.

Consider this vision of freedom from a Christian Mysticism.

The mystical vision of freedom, of "letting go" of the world, interprets possessing and being possessed. That vision appears to be something infinitely bigger and more unreal than such little endeavors as dealing responsibly with the power of money. But then it may well be that "that of God in us" is present in both the big crazies and the small practical ways of dealing with the principalities and powers under which we exist. The retreat of Thomas Merton to the solitude of a Trappist monastery is not that far removed from an annual intervention in the shareholders meeting. The craziness of giving things away is a symbol that transmits an idea of

genuine freedom. Craziness and reason are not nearly as far apart as technocratic education makes us believe. According to Goethe Lessing, they who do not lose their mind over certain things have no mind to lose.

– Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: mysticism and Resistance*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001. P255.

I wonder how “that of God in us” calls us to be losing our minds over certain things in these times?

Mark Twain famously stated:

“Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it.”

Jokes aside, it is our apostolic calling to care deeply for our nation. We care because our particular understanding of peace and freedom come from the Word of God. In this sense, our patriotism is a function of divine citizenship. And we can celebrate the promises of the Good News yet to be realized: for the incomplete measure of freedom we know, for the sacrifices made, for the atonement to marginalized peoples yet to come, we lean upon God in our poverty.

Jesus warns us that witnessing for peace will be a difficult and dangerous task. He asks us to let go. In the eyes of a world drunk with power we can easily be christened as nothing but “a bunch of crazies.” He asks us to lose our minds. And yes, we can expect to become uneasy, to be uncomfortable, to be troubled with any national discourse and ideology that conflicts with the radical political agenda of Jesus Christ. To do otherwise, pulls us dangerously close to Christian nationalism, which is itself idolatry.

Nevertheless, with all the powerful skills we apostles have been bestowed, Jesus says:

“Do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Rejoice not in power and privilege, even in those your faith brings: rejoice solely in the grace-claim that God the father has spoken over you as beloved. Chosen. Treasured. Empty handed yet full to the brim.

All authority has been given to you. Nothing can ultimately hurt you. Your name is written in the ethereal eternity of heaven itself. Rest easy - because God in Christ - has our back as an apostle to be an ephemeral well-spring of the Good News working for social righteousness

My American flag waves this day, clothed in dazzling July heat. But I stand here, in this pulpit, saying,

“The kingdom of God has come near to you!” The white garment of Christ waves in the wind in dazzling white light, casting its long shadow - an eclipse full of love and hope, peace and protest, prophecy and praise. We have made the choice to gather under this banner, bringing us into communion with a beloved, a real crazy haphazard collection of laborers with whom we help to gather the harvest.

A bountiful harvest meant for every nation, every flag, every person under God's good sun.

Amen.