

July 3, 2022 Proper 9
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Sent Out to Live a Prayer
Church of the Good Shepherd, Athens, Ohio

Sometimes it can be beneficial to remember the meaning of the prayers we say every Sunday, whether we are together in person or online. Take for example the prayer after receiving Holy Communion, called the Post-Communion Prayer. *The Book of Common Prayer* gives us two choices, one on page 365 and the other on page 366. Here at Church of the Good Shepherd we had been using the one on page 366 since Easter and have recently switched to the prayer on page 365. Both are a kind of prayer called a sending prayer. You can look at them right now, if you want.

The first part of each prayer acknowledges God and our gratitude to God for receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion; for being nourished in body and spirit with the food of everlasting life, for receiving a taste of our salvation and God's Kingdom here on earth, a Kingdom we are members of. The second part of both prayers begins with the words "send us out". Those words not only mean the worship service is almost over, but they also indicate one of main purposes for worshipping together.

We gather together either in person or on-line to worship God, to listen to the Scriptures and process them through hymns, music, and a sermon, to share in the sacrament of Holy Communion, and then to do what followers of Jesus did in our Gospel reading today: to go out into the world. In our Gospel Jesus sent not only the twelve disciples, he also sent seventy disciples with a very specific purpose: to go where he was going to go and prepare people to receive Jesus by telling them and showing them who Jesus is. They weren't to go from door to door selling Jesus, but to stay in one place and do what Jesus did: share meals, teach, heal and to announce in their actions that God's Kingdom has come near to the people and places they visited.

Likewise, the words of the sending prayer in our *Book of Common Prayer* sends us out with an intentional purpose: to love and serve others in witness of Christ, with a spirit of peace and gladness.

Perhaps another way of thinking about what the Post Communion prayer is commissioning us to do is, like Jesus commissioned his 70 followers, is to bring a little bit of the Kingdom of God we have tasted into the world with us. That means wherever we go, whether it's home, a trip to the grocery store, the post office, restaurants, work, a meeting – both in person meetings and video conference meetings- phone calls, emails,

letters or notes, every conversation we have, with the reminder that because we received Holy Communion we are bringing not just ourselves, but a bit of Christ with us to the people we encounter in every place we go.

That means we bring something sacred with us into the world.

This manifestation of the sacred isn't necessarily acts of charity, but in actions that work for creating opportunities for all people, forgiving those who hurt us and working to dismantle systems that perpetuate harm over. It is working to create places where we are judged not by our race or gender or economic status or level of education or physical ability but for our personhood. It is lifting each other up, making room for each other, working for true equality for all people, because that is what God's Kingdom is like.

We can forget that institutions, whether they are the church or universities, or governments don't represent God's Kingdom in and of themselves. That doesn't mean they are bad, and we should walk away, it just means they are human and susceptible to the lie that there aren't enough resources to go around, and to survive they have to grab all they can and take advantage of people to get what they think they deserve. The lie that power and money will save us is a hard one to resist. However, these institutions are also the social structures we have to operate in, whether or not we like them or whether or not they serve us all equally, we have to find a way to live in them where we participate in the sacred practice of respecting the dignity of every person.

This is what Paul was talking about in his letter to the Galatians that is one of our readings for today when he wrote we need to care for each other by bearing each other's burdens and to persist even in the face of injustice. Because the truth is the world could be a more equal place if we lived into embodying the sacrament we receive.

I have recently heard people say they don't feel like celebrating Independence Day this year. And that is okay. Sometimes we don't feel like celebrating. Others are looking forward to a celebration and that is okay too. We are all in different places emotionally, spiritually, even politically. I suspect the seventy people Jesus sent out into the world were just as diverse as those of us he sends out into the world today. Like the Gospel reading for today reminds us, sometimes we will find success and positive experiences in the world and sometimes we will experience the pain and suffering. Sometimes things will work out, sometimes they won't. What is important, like Paul reminds his readers, is to not give up embodying the Love of God in Christ wherever we go, in what we say, and do.

Regardless of what we feel like, we can remember we can bring into the world of disappointments, delights, worries, and beauty is the love of God in Christ. Perhaps by remembering we carry the sacred with us we'll get better at recognizing the sacred is also out in the world waiting to encounter us, and such sacred meetings can bring about healing, renewal, and new life that is the Kingdom of God.

When we leave the church today after receiving Holy Communion, I hope wherever you go, however you are feeling, you remember you carry within you the nourishment of God's Kingdom and have been commissioned to share God's Kingdom like a living prayer in the world.