

*A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, July 7, 2013, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 9, dedicated to David Knox, who entered eternal life on July 1, 2013, to our Youth in Mission, who head to Cincinnati for a week in mission, and always to the glory of God!*

## **“On A Mission from God”**

### ***II Kings 5:1-14; Luke 10:1-11; 16-20***

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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In 1980, “Joliet” Jake E. Blues and his brother Elwood J. Blues (aka John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd) hit the big screen full blast with their film *The Blues Brothers*. Released from Joliet Prison, the two ex-cons and Blues Singers, hit the road in their Bluesmobile making music, singing in black gospel choirs (while wearing their black suits, black hats, and sunglasses), facing down the neo-Nazis in Joliet and searching for God’s redemption for all the sins of their youth.

They find their way into the Triple Rock Church under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Cleophus James. There they are saved (relatively speaking) in the power of Jesus’ name. Then they set work to trying in their rockin’, rollin’ and mostly vulgar way to set their lives in order and to set the world on a path to God. When asked throughout the film what these two “Blues’ Brothers” are up to (which is always hard to figure out), Elwood continues to answer: *“We are on a mission from God.”*

*On a mission from God!* That is where we meet up with 70 disciples of Jesus in today's gospel – they are on a mission from God! Having been commissioned and instructed by Jesus what to take and what not to take on their journey, 70 disciples set out two-by-two in every imaginable direction to spread the word of Jesus throughout the land. We read that, in the end, they return in joy and share the good news of their results in the mission fields of first century Palestine.

To go on a mission from God, Jesus tells them, travel light and be polite (good guidelines for our teens headed out the door today!). First, pack light. No purse. No bag. No sandals (it is really hot on that ground!). They are to greet no one on the road – not being rude – but protecting themselves from attacks by thieves. For our teens we add no cell phones, no ipods, no electronic diversions. We also encourage them to bring shoes. No one goes on mission barefoot on the streets of Cincinnati. We are also trying to keep some of our dynamic missionaries to one suitcase. Let's read on . . .

Second, they are called to be polite. When they get to someone's house, bring peace upon them. Not judgment. When welcomed, cure the sick. If not welcome, shake the dust off your feet in protest and move on. But, whether welcomed or rejected, they are to say, "*The kingdom of God has come near to you.*" This is good for our youth as well. Bring peace and the love of God to others. Be a part of their healing not their hurts. And if words get rough and times get tough, walk away from the fray.

Before we go on – let's remember the context for Jesus' instructions for the disciples' road show. Jesus has just been rejected in a small town in Samaria in chapter 9. But, rather than sending his 70 out with a message to bring down fire upon those who contest their presence, they are to bring love to their neighbors on the way. In addition, later in Chapter 10, Luke tells the story of the "Good Samaritan." So, these men on a mission from God are fully aware of the all that they may encounter. Travel light and be polite. AND bring good news and love to those who welcome them. Don't linger with those who don't want you around.

Since there are no camera crews that accompany the 35 pairs headed in all sorts of directions, we don't hear about them again until their return in verse 16. They ALL return in joy (I have witnessed this kind of 100% joyful return in our youth in mission, too). It doesn't get any better for first time evangelists! But the reports coming back are all about demons submitting to them (They were not instructed to cast out demons. . . . O well, it worked!). Jesus is overjoyed himself! They have addressed the power of evil in this world and through the power of God; they have overcome evil with good. Jesus says clearly to them, *"Don't get pumped up about conquering spirits. Get pumped up that God has vanquished the spirits! Instead, you should be excited about your name being written in the book of heaven!"*

Again, going out in God's name should bring a return in joy! Lesson learned. Soak up the good news of the gospel of Jesus alive in the people you meet on the way.

Each one of us should have a take away from this great passage about serving God when you go out into the world. This week, I received a note about one of our members who makes a difference in this world. The person who took time to write it said of this person that she is incredible in the workplace and takes her intelligence, her love and her joy out into the world to others through the work she does. Paraphrasing my understanding of this beautiful note, I heard, *"You should be proud of her. She represents the best of Christian love in her everyday work and it makes a difference in this world."*

I see this in the person mentioned in the note. But I see this in every one of you as well. Through the years, I have witnessed your good works in the name of Jesus Christ, spreading hope and joy across the world. Your hands, your hearts, your spirits of love and openness to God and one another inspire me. Day by day, moment by moment, mission by mission, you are out spreading God's love and you return in joy.

This last week, I had the awesome experience of being the puffed up and proud pastor of First Church as I watched eight of

our church members at General Synod in Long Beach. Kim Crabtree was singing and dancing and spreading joy and delight with everyone she met. Sarah Ahrens was laughing, learning and leading as Ohio's youngest delegate to General Synod. Joyce Oyler was listening, reflecting and leading from a booth in the Exhibition Hall and on the floor of Synod as a delegate. Bob Kutschbach was deepening his love and commitment to the UCC and representing the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UCC's commitment to fair housing.

Rev. Marti Baumer was humbly standing before us celebrated as a longtime member of the Pension Boards in our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of this important ministry. Heather Giffen was blending in as an advocate, representative and friend of Native American Indians who brought an important resolution to the Synod concerning our separation from the 1,000-year-old "Doctrine of Discovery," which set forth western Christianity against native people in the Americas.

Carly Kutschbach was enjoying the youth of the UCC and dancing for delight in her time in California. The Rev. Phil Hart, the Ohio Conference's new designated Conference Minister, was sharing his innovative spirit with the whole UCC and when called upon to speak, bringing laughter and love to the room as he welcomed everyone to come to General Synod 30 in Cleveland in 2015. And thanks to the efforts of Rick Sayre, First Church was pictured in a video on the history of the Pension Boards! As a special bonus, we were visited by Alice Panek one day, as she reconnected with her lifelong friend Heather Giffen.

With our nine, we represented the largest number of members from any congregation in Ohio outside of Cleveland (where our national staff people attend church)! It was awesome to watch the Disciples of Christ from First Congregational UCC in Columbus spreading God's love in Long Beach. But I will tell you we represented a mere 1% of this congregation, which daily goes out to do acts of mercy, love and justice in this world. The rest of you – 99% of you - were back here doing good works for Christ! For that, I am deeply thankful!

As we come to the table of grace and to receive God's love and grace, let us go out today and tomorrow to love and serve Christ. We will leave here serving Christ – and although I hope we don't do it like Elwood and Jake – we will go out on a mission from God! Amen.

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