

July 6, 2025 Luke 10:1-11, 16-21

This weekend is the July 4th, weekend, the time of the year that we celebrate our life liberty and the pursuit of our happiness. We have enjoyed these rights in these United States for the past 249 years. It is hard to believe we will be celebrating 250 years of this great nation in 2026. The Bicentennial was my first year in college, 1976 and here we are looking at the 250th anniversary of this great country.

Today we hear the story of Jesus sending 70 followers out on a mission. Before they head out, Jesus gives them instructions. It will not be an easy journey. "I'm sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves," Jesus warns.

It's a depiction of vulnerability. Being a disciple of Jesus doesn't come with a super hero's cape. They won't be endowed with a protective, heavenly aura. The same holds true for us. When we're baptized, we're sealed by the Holy Spirit. But we don't receive a protective force field around us, keeping us secure from all earthly harm. Following our mission in Christ's name, we maintain a critical vulnerability. This susceptibility helps us, actually. We grow in compassion to others who are poor and sick and marginalized. There are many wolves out there. And also many lambs.

Secondly, Jesus tells them to travel light. REALLY light. He says, "Don't take a money purse with you. Don't pack a bag. Don't even take an extra pair of shoes." Again, it creates a very vulnerable atmosphere. He's sending them into the midst of a hostile world with no means of self-support. Instead, into whichever town they enter, Jesus wants them to trust – trust in the care that will come to them. Enter the first house that opens its doors.

"Take nothing with you," Jesus instructed. But we'll see that there was one thing they took with them.

There is a book entitled "All that She Carried" by Tiya Miles. The book describes the history of a very old cotton sack dating to the time of slavery in South Carolina. The sack turned up at a flea market in the early 2000's. A message was embroidered in the worn and stained sack. The woman discovered it there realized that the sack traced a remarkable family legacy from the days of slavery.

The sack has come to be identified as Ashley's Sack. It records what happened when a nine-year-old girl named Ashley was sold and the final gift her mother gave her. This story was hand embroidered onto the sack by Ashley's granddaughter, Ruth Middleton in 1921. She stitched this story:

My great grandmother Rose, mother of Ashley gave her this sack when she was sold at age 9 in South Carolina it held a tattered dress 3 handfuls of pecans a braid of Roses hair. Told her It be

filled with my Love always she never saw her again. Ashley is my grandmother. Ruth Middleton
1921

Ashley's Sack tells a story of a mother's love. Rose was powerless to prevent the sale of her nine-year-old daughter. Ashley was going to be sent out like a lamb in the midst of hostile wolves, and there was nothing Rose could do.

Very quickly, in the few remaining moments they had together in this earthly life, Rose assembled a care package. It contained practical items as well as an emotional connection to the mother who loved her. The tattered dress would cover and protect Ashley. The pecans were a portable and relatively non-perishable food to provide her with nourishment. The hair braid was something Rose's frightened and lonely daughter could keep close to remember and feel her mother.

When the sack was discovered in the flea market, the dress, the pecans, and the braid of Rose's hair were no longer within it. But one thing remained. The bag will forever be filled with Rose's love.

Ashley's Sack is a legacy of a family's love and resilience through the unimaginably cruel and terrible trial of American slavery. After the pecans had been consumed and the fibers of the tattered dress were exhausted, the invisible strands of love from her mother continued to sustain Ashley. The sack is what she kept. She kept it and passed it down as her most treasured heirloom. "It be filled with my love always." That was the legacy. That love passed down through the generations all the way to her granddaughter, Ruth. The love in the sack had not diminished.

Jesus directed his apostles not to take a purse or a bag or a pair of sandals. But there was one thing the 70 apostles took with them. It never diminished in quantity, even when they gave it away.

That one item was the peace of Christ. Jesus' peace went with them. Like Rose's love in Ashley's sack, the invisible peace of Jesus went with them and it never abandoned them.

What is this peace of Christ? On the night of Jesus' birth, the heavenly angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, PEACE among people." And on the night of his arrest, Jesus said to his disciples, "PEACE I leave with you; my PEACE I give to you. I do not give you as the world gives." After Jesus rose from the dead, the first words from his mouth when he met his disciples were, "PEACE be with you."

Jesus is known as the Prince of PEACE. There's a peace that comes only from Christ. St. Paul said that it's unlike any other peace. It's not of this world and it's beyond our comprehension. He wrote, "The PEACE of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Jesus' peace is unlike worldly peace. In our earthly context, peace is something external. We have peace when there's an absence of conflict, when we're trouble-free. This kind of peace is dependent on our circumstances. We enjoy peace when we're free from hassle or stress, when our present circumstances are secure.

But the peace we receive from Jesus isn't dependent on favorable surroundings. Its origin isn't external. Jesus' peace can be with us even through threat and sorrow.

The peace of Christ gives us the ability to endure. Even though we're besieged, even though we're surrounded by enemies both visible and invisible, the peace of Christ gives us an inner calm. We know that God will make a way, God will see us through all things. Fear and worry are replaced with a peace we simply cannot explain.

When we call Jesus the Prince of Peace, we're referring to his peace that comes from a source other than this world. His peace has that enduring quality because it comes through his resurrection. It cannot be snuffed out! Jesus' peace has overcome even death. This is why the resurrected Christ greets his disciple by declaring, "Peace be with you." It's not an invitation; it's a declaration. Peace is with them, physically standing before them! Peace is realized in the power of his resurrection.

Jesus' peace contains the bottomless grace of Christ's love. It's a love that overcomes all obstacles to reunite us with our loving and eternal God, the source of our being. This divine love has the power to heal. It binds up what is broken. It gives us the assurance that, no matter what happens, God is at work through all things, and the outcome of all things is with God. The Bible's final divine declaration is, "Behold, I am making all things new." This is our interior wellspring. This is the source of our peace. This is the peace that the 70 apostles took with them, and we enjoy that same peace, too.

It's a peace that cannot be eradicated. It can be shared. It can multiply, but it cannot, cannot be reduced

or eliminated. Just as Jesus told the 70, if the peace you give doesn't find a home, it will come back to you.

Jesus sends us into this world as agents of his peace. We're a community of his peace. We carry it with us. And like the love within Ashley's Sack, that peace of Christ will remain with us! Wherever our footpaths may take us, we live within that deep, divine peace which passes human understanding. Amen

"The PEACE of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."