

Road Rules

(Luke 10:1-11)

Four simple words, reported to have been first spoken from the backseat of the camel caravan as the Israelites wandered the wilderness for forty years and hence forth passed down from generation to generation until I spoke those same four words from the back of our family's lime green station wagon; and now the mantle has been passed to my own children who over the din of the portable DVD player and video games still say, "Are we there yet?" The question is inevitable any time you plan to travel outside a two block radius of your home. Truth be told, our kids are simply giving voice to the weariness of miles that add up on anybody. But think about those moments of excitement right before you leave. When we speak in clichés about hitting the open road with the wind in our hair, going on a grand adventure, experiencing new cultures and as we say those words hope-filled smiles cross our face. And just as the phrase "are we there yet" has echoed across centuries, I wonder what sort of thoughts roamed around the minds of the seventy as they were pairing up to go out on the road and embark on this journey Jesus was sending them.

Were there excited whispers about seeing the Samaritan countryside? Or did they nervously wonder aloud about the local cuisine? Jesus sent out the seventy not on a sightseeing vacation, but as scouts to the places and communities he soon planned to visit. Even more than a fact-finding report, the seventy were commissioned to be ministers, they healed and brought peace and shared God's presence. But before they left, they were given the road rules. Look at verse 3, "Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like "Lambs in the midst of wolves". There is a catchy ad our churches will not ever put in *The Gazette*. But the truth of Jesus' road rules is we go out into the world reliant not on our own power or persuasive speech, but reliant wholly on God's grace. We are vulnerable as we seek to be God's people in this world, lambs amid the wolves, that still resonates for us standing among the seventy listening to Jesus today. But just in case we are not entirely clear on the inescapability of vulnerability Jesus adds to the road rules by saying to them carry no purse; no (bag) or no (sandals). You can now see where the airlines get their current baggage policy. But honestly, I hear this and I am anxious. I like my stuff. I always pack an extra outfit, throw in an extra coat, or a nice shirt in case I decide to treat our family to a fancy meal when out on the road. Jesus road rules sever the ties not simply from our stuff but really from our reliance on our stuff as a buffer between us and wholly relying on God's grace when we go out into the world. The clincher of the inescapability of vulnerability is the road rule Jesus said twice, they are to eat only what is set in front of them. The seventy are to be open radically to the hospitality of those who welcome them. Is there anything more challenging for us today than to be the recipient of someone else's hospitality? We feel indebted to the other person in ways that our own self-reliance shifts uncomfortably within us.

I remember when Ethan was born. The church I was serving did what churches do, they cooked. Our refrigerator was filled with jell-o representing all the colors of the rainbow; pans of lasagna and hot dish filled the shelves; cakes and cookies sat on our countertop. This was to be a surprise for Gina and I as first time parents, so no one sat down to go over the meal plan with us. Rather people with hospitality lovingly offered us what they thought we'd like. In verse seven Jesus says, remain in the same house, eating and drinking, "whatever they provide". Inescapable vulnerability is a doorway to God's kingdom. Not that it

is an easy portal to pass through for the seventy or for us today. Inescapable vulnerability is a key part of the road rules that Jesus still offers to us as the church today.

But we are not left empty handed. Jesus offers a promise of healing and wholeness to accompany all who go out; Jesus instructs the seventy, and us, to offer peace and God's presence in authentic ways. Jesus offers realistic courage to go forth, even as lambs in the midst of wolves, with a word of hope for a hurting world. Friends, this is still our mission as church today. In a world where I am constantly told that blemishes on my face can be cleared, my cholesterol can be lowered, my clothes can make a better impression, and Botox can ease away any worried lines in response to feeling inadequate; when those voices surround me and convince me that I can buy my way toward healing and wholeness and peace, the voice of Jesus does sound like the soft "baa" of a lamb amid the howling of the wolves. We live with that tension as people of faith. We come here faithfully this July 4th, all about seventy of us. And before we leave to go about feasting on potato salad and various grilled meats and catching candy at parades and watching lights against the night sky; we hear the invitation of Jesus to go into this world with a purpose of sharing God's presence and offering God's peace.

The road rules of the seventy still apply, we will still feel that inescapable vulnerability of trying to offer something that perhaps people will not want or accept. How can you and I as we step outside the church door go into this world with a wholeness and peace? Maybe there a neighbor we could offer a different presence to. Or a co-worker we need to try another way of relating to. Go deeper, to that place where you and I need to receive, be offered a word of forgiveness and reconciliation. It goes both ways. The road rules are a two way street. The seventy are sent with a mission to both offer and receive. We are invited to listen to the wisdom of Jesus about receiving other's hospitality and offering God's presence as embodied within each of us in authentic ways. To be sure, there are weeks when Wednesday rolls around and we feel like we've veered off course. We find ourselves acting more like the wolf than the lamb. We find ourselves dreaming about the BMWs rather than the kingdom of God. If that is the case, take out this passage of scripture and listen for how God's grace is showing us how to get back to a way of peace and authentic relationships. In that moment of hearing these words again, or better yet seeing how our relationship with a co-worker changes, then maybe the truth of the words, "the kingdom of God has come near" will ring true in our hearts. So that when someone says, "Are we there yet," we will smile and say "yes".

May it be so for you and for me. Thanks be to God. Amen.