

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I'm about to say something very obvious to those of you who know me well. Stubbornness runs in my family. It's been that way as long as I can remember. At family gatherings I always wondered why my aunts and uncles were arguing over what seemed like minutiae. As I look back with adult eyes, I now realize that we as a family are a stubborn people, set in our ways, and unlikely to change. What frightens me most is that I'm pretty sure I've managed to pass that gene along to our children.

Several years ago my father-in-law taught me that, should people call *me* stubborn, I am to tell them that I prefer words with a better connotation, like *tenacious* or *persistent*.

Persistence can be a good thing, can't it? And that's exactly what the seventy were going to need in today's Gospel reading. After all, Jesus says that he was sending them out like lambs into the midst of wolves. They were to take nothing with them for the journey except their mission to share the peace of Christ, cure the sick, and proclaim the kingdom of God. They were to "carry no purse, no bag, no sandals," and were to "greet no one on the road."

This reminds me of a road trip that Rebekah and I took from South Carolina to visit my family in Pennsylvania. I was scheduled to play an organ recital at a church near my mom's house and Rebekah agreed to play clarinet on one piece. I think it was somewhere on Interstate 81 in Virginia that Rebekah asked me if I happened to put her clarinet in the car. After an awkward silence, we decided that we were like the seventy in today's Gospel reading, carrying no case, no clarinet, no reeds for the journey. We persisted in our drive north, calling upon the goodwill of an old friend, who allowed us to borrow her clarinet.

"Whatever house you enter," Jesus said to them, "first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you." Likewise he says, "Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat...cure the sick...and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But 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.'"

What is interesting to me isn't just the fact that Jesus gives the seventy a mission, but that he also tells them what to do if they are rejected. If a person does not share their peace, they are to let that go and continue their work of curing the sick. If they enter a town and are not welcome, they are to proclaim that "the kingdom of God has come near," to shake the dust from their feet, and to move on; as if to say, "Well, I've done all that I can do here."

Jesus warns the seventy that not everyone will welcome them. And by explaining to them how they are to react, he makes even the act of moving on part of their work for the sake of the Gospel. After all, isn't being despised and rejected exactly how Jesus accomplished our salvation? His peace is a persistent peace. It rests on those who wish to share in it and, when rejected, insists upon finding another to embrace.

After his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples, gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit, and said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” In today’s Gospel reading Jesus says, “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

As Jesus’ disciples today, we too are led by the Holy Spirit for the sake of God’s mission in the world. But we also know that the risk of rejection is real. The question, I suppose, is whether or not we are ready to be persistent in sharing his peace—not stubborn, but persistent.

There are plenty of stubborn voices in the world right now. I think of politicians who stand their ground on any number of issues; of many in the media who have formed allegiances with one candidate or another; of those who clamor for guns or denounce entire groups of people on the basis of race or creed. But *this* is not *our* calling.

We are called to bear the peace of a particular *someone* into the world. This isn’t just a message, but is a tangible gift of grace that we bear. Whether we are at home, at work, or visiting with friends, we extend *Christ’s* peace when we speak a loving word of encouragement. We bring *Christ’s* healing when we are present with someone who is ill or hurting. We proclaim the nearness of the kingdom of God when we break bread with one another. And if those things are not welcome—if *we* are rejected—then we too are called to move on, to share that peace with someone who will gladly receive it.

But such moving on is hard. When we find ourselves in the midst of a difficult relationship, when our workplace environment is rife with conflict, when sickness or disease get the best of our bodies or minds, it would be easy to double down, fighting for our own benefit, blaming the other, or even questioning the nearness of the kingdom of God. Because of sin, which creates brokenness and division, it can become a burden to share the peace of Christ.

But let us not forget that Jesus died and was raised to liberate us from sin, and that the peace of Christ remains. Even if everything in our lives should fall apart around us, this peace that surpasses all our human understanding will never leave us. In today’s first reading from Isaiah, for example, the people of God who returned from exile were crushed that Judah had not been restored. Even in their hopelessness God comforted his people as persistently as a mother comforts her child.

Even more, God in Jesus Christ was persistent to the point of death for us and for our salvation. It is *that* God who calls each and every one of us as fellow workers in the kingdom of God. In Galatians, St. Paul commends the family of faith—that’s you and me—to be persistent. “Let us not grow weary in doing what is right,” Paul writes, “for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then,” he continues, “whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all.”

So what does it look like when we share this peace of Christ and bring the kingdom of God nearer to those around us? Does it look like making sandwiches at Fraternité Notre Dame for the hungry in Chicago’s Austin neighborhood? Does it look like a Stephen Minister caring for another Grace member in need? Does it look like a child at Grace School being nurtured in academics and in the faith? Yes. It is all of these things and many more.

But it especially looks like the people of God gathered around the Word and the Holy Sacraments. The peace of Christ is extended most visibly in the body and blood of the Eucharist, in the Word of God proclaimed, and in the waters of Holy Baptism. Here, we physically turn toward one another in Christ's name to say, "Peace be with you." In this act we share the very peace that Jesus shared with the first disciples on the evening of his resurrection. We become one body—his body—and bear a more perfect peace because of what happens here.

"Go in peace. Serve the Lord," we hear at the conclusion of the liturgy. We eagerly respond, "Thanks be to God." We go in *Christ's* peace and serve, that through our words and deeds the kingdom of God may come near. We take nothing with us for this journey except for that mission; no purse, no bag, no sandals. And if you like, you can even leave your clarinet at home.

Amen.