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Pentecost 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Peacemaker Cometh”

Text: Luke 10:1-20 (Galatians 6:1-10; 14-18; Isaiah 66:10-14)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Gospel we heard last week, in the verses just before the Gospel today, Jesus *turned His face to go to Jerusalem* (Luke 9:51). And because He was going to Jerusalem, and because the old rivalry between the Jews and the Samaritans was still going strong, the Samaritans rejected Him. So the disciples asked Jesus (Luke 9:54): “*Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?*” If you’re like them (and like me), that thought has crossed your mind from time to time for a few choice people in this world, too! A little fire from heaven would come in handy once in a while . . .

But Jesus doesn’t think that too good an idea. In fact, it’s a pretty bad idea. So He doesn’t just say no - much more than that, He rebukes them. Because this isn’t just a bad idea, it’s a completely backwards, upside-down, 180 degree wrong idea. The fire that was going to come down from heaven, it wasn’t for them, for the Samaritans, for sinners, *it was for Jesus*. This is why He was going to Jerusalem. To go to the cross. That on that altar, the fire of God’s wrath against all the sin of all the world all come down upon Him and consume Him instead of us. Jesus came to be their Saviour too.

And this wasn’t the first time Jesus rebuked His disciples like this. Not too long before this, when Jesus was teaching His disciples about this same cross, Peter interrupts Him and says (Matthew 16:22-23), “*No, Lord, this will never happen to you!*” And Jesus rebukes him and says, “*Get behind me, satan.*” Yes, this will happen. This fire. This sacrifice. This is why Jesus came. This is why He was going to Jerusalem.

So instead of fire, today we heard Jesus send *His disciples* out two-by-two ahead of Him, to go into every town and place where He Himself was about to go, not to bring *fire* but to bring *peace*. Because fire is what they already knew. They’d been burned by the sins of others, by their own sins, by the world; by foes and sometimes even by friends. Fire is what they already had - the fires of pain and grief and troubles that always seem to mount and seldom go away. You know what it’s like. Fire they already had; peace is what they needed. They just didn’t know where to find it. They didn’t know *in whom* to find it. They needed to know. They needed

someone to tell them.

So Jesus sends out these 36 pairs of disciples to proclaim this One who has come not to bring more fire but to bring peace and to make peace between God and man through His own sacrifice on the cross. But in going, Jesus says, it won't be easy. There will be rejection, and more. They will be *like lambs in the midst of wolves*.

For satan, who broke this peace and wants it to stay broken, will oppose them at every turn. And while that may not be a very good mental image to go out with, it is a very Christological one. For in this they are imitators of Jesus, the Lamb of God thrown to the satanic wolf to defeat that wolf. And that's good news: for while in the world, wolves always win contests against lambs, it is not so with God. With God, the Lamb wins.

So they are to go and proclaim peace. Just like the angels when Jesus was born, they are to proclaim "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace goodwill toward man*" (Luke 2:14). The peacemaker is here. And if they are rejected, they are rejected. But no fire. Just peace. Just forgiveness. Just the good news. The good news that ***the kingdom of God has come near*** them. Come near through the preaching of the Word; through the coming of the Word made flesh. For where Jesus is, there is the kingdom of God. And where the Word is, there is Jesus. And so the disciples are sent not alone, and not even just two-by-two - even better, *they take Jesus with them*. ***He who hears you hears me***, Jesus says.

Now, there is a judgment, for those who will not have this peace; for those who will not have Jesus. ***Woe to you***, Jesus also says. But this judgment is not yet. And this is not what Jesus wants. He has come to take our judgment on the cross, that our judgment on the last day be good news. For on the last day, not fire from heaven but the fire of hell will be the fate of those who reject the cross; who reject their Saviour.

So Jesus sends the preaching of His Word that none be lost. His Word calling us to repentance, calling us to faith, calling us to forgiveness and life. Calling Jews, calling Samaritans, calling all. Calling you.

For who are you in this story? Where are you? Are you the ones who have heard the Word of God? Yes. This good news has been proclaimed to you through the pastor (or pastors) sent to you. This good news has been poured over you in baptism, and preached to you, and announced to you, and placed into your mouths in the Lord's Supper. Yes, the kingdom of God has come near you and is in you. Wonderful news, that!

But is that all? Or might you also be of those who have rejected the Word? Oh,

maybe not all of it, but some of it? Rejecting the parts you don't like, ignoring the parts that are inconvenient or difficult, passing over the parts that aren't popular or politically correct or condemn what you like to do? Repent then. Repent and return to the Lord. Repent and hear the Word of the Lord - His Word of peace and forgiveness and life that He would give to you.

Yet maybe you are also those sent out with the Word. Yes, this is you too. For while you haven't been called and sent as pastors, and you're not sent two-by-two like the 72, you who have received the good news and good work of Jesus go out with this good news and good work, taking to your friends and neighbors, to family and to strangers, what you have here received. Today we will bid farewell and godspeed to the Tallmons as *they* go out from this place to Wyoming. We say goodbye to the Hensleys today as they begin their trip back to California. But not only them, you too. Whoever you are and wherever you go. And the kingdom of God draws near to those to whom you speak Jesus' Word of forgiveness and peace. As you speak the good news of a Saviour who came and took the fire for us and for all people. No matter who they are or what they have done.

This is what Paul told the Galatians, that in our life together we bring not fire, but peace. *Restore those caught in transgression in a spirit of gentleness, he says. Bear one another's burdens. Do not grow weary in doing good. Boast only in the cross of Christ.* These things don't ignore sin or approve of sin or pretend there is no sin, but recognize the reality of sin and point to the solution to sin: the cross of Christ.

And with that Word, satan falls! ***The 72 returned with joy*** at the peace that came through them in the Word, and that still is. For the Word is still working and the Spirit still active. The harvest is still growing. And by that forgiving and life-giving Word, satan and his lies and fires are still struck down. His lies silenced by God's truth. His accusations silenced by Jesus' forgiveness. His deception silenced by the Spirit's wisdom. His fires doused by the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' crucified and pierced side (John 19:34).

The wolf's teeth are no match for the Lamb's blood. The wolf's hate no match for the Lamb's love. The wolf's appetite no match for the Lamb's forgiveness. Though it may not always appear so, in our world with so many problems and so many sins - sins legalized, sins flaunted, sins demanded to be regarded as normal and even good, and more and more arising everyday . . . *but who you gonna believe?* Yourself, the world, or Jesus? Weak you, a proud world, or the Creator of all things? Sinful you, a fallen world, or the Lamb of God risen from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father? There is much more in this world than meets the eye.

So come and receive the victory of Jesus as He and His kingdom draw near you today. Or as Isaiah put it: ***nurse and be satisfied from her [the church's] consoling***

breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance. For thus says the Lord: Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river . . . Peace, for here is His font and pulpit and altar of peace, His Word, His absolution, His Body and Blood *for you* for the forgiveness of your sins. Drink deeply and receive the gifts He sends and gives to you.

And take that gift with you now as you leave this place, wherever you go. For still the harvest is plentiful. And even if for now you, like Paul, ***bear on your body the marks of Jesus*** - suffering and persecution for His name - know that you will share in His glory also. For your name, too, is written in heaven.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.