

**“Teams and Trust”**  
**Luke 10:1-11; Hosea 11:1-9**  
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The disciple life is not really all that tempting if you ask me. Sure, curing sickness sounds meaningful. But not when you have to go out with only one other partner and nothing much but the clothes on your back. Staying wherever people welcome you in. Eating whatever they serve. Announcing that the kingdom is near. There’s vulnerability in this particular kind of couch surfing and I kind of wonder how many bad experiences the disciples had. Sleepless nights on mats that didn’t feel like the ones at home. Food that tasted weird. People with odd expectations or habits. I got a small taste of that at in Taizé, France this summer. Every summer this ecumenical order of brothers hosts thousands of young people who come there for contemplation, retreat, and renewal. The hospitality was fantastic in almost every way except for the food, which was terrible. Stale bread with a piece of cheese for breakfast. Instant coffee made with lukewarm water drunk out of a plastic bowl. It was the fastest weight loss program ever. It made me grateful that we’ve mostly turned discipleship into a metaphor.

There’s vulnerability for those wandering disciples. There’s also vulnerability for the hosts. Take in some random strangers who want to speak with you about the kingdom of God? Buy and prepare their food? I don’t think so.

It’s that mutual vulnerability that seems so risky and uncomfortable, which is probably why at least a couple of the disciples balked at their nonviolent assignment in the previous chapter. Jesus enters a town of Samaritans and is not received into anyone’s home. James and John ask Jesus, “You want us to burn the whole place down?”

I know that this is most assuredly not the kind of response that Jesus is looking for. James and John do get reprimanded for their retributive instincts. But I can totally identify with their response especially in these times. I can think of a few public places where I’d like God to reign down fire from heaven. When news commentators go after children who are angry at adults who are actively working to warm the planet, I’d like to see some fire from heaven. When female legislators of color are told they should “go back to where they came from” in the not so coded language of white supremacy, I’d like to see some fire from heaven. When Greta Thunburg is attacked for her disability by people who don’t have the guts to address her on the terms of her informed arguments, I’d like to see some fire from heaven.

But Jesus wants his disciples to experience *vulnerable connection* which is hard to do when you are consumed with righteous anger. It’s not that righteous anger is bad. It’s just that when it takes up all the air in the room there’s not much left for the kind of connection that Jesus is pushing. And that’s the connection that Jesus seems to be most interested in cultivating. It’s kind of the point of the Gospel – God loves you and wants to be in relationship with you.

When Michele and I chose this New Testament text we were thinking about how teams of people build trust. Trust is almost never something that you start with on any team with people you don't yet know. It's something that's built over time but it's not the thing you start with. It's not the foundational ingredient that you need in order to work alongside others for a common goal. The road toward trust starts with accountability. Jesus gives the disciples an assignment and then he watches to see who completes it and who needs to grow and learn.

Accountability is the building block for all forms of leadership. It's the sorting out of those who say they want to do something from those who are actually prepared to act on what they say. In the text just before this one, Jesus calls several people who say they want to follow him, but then have other things to distract them from following through. If you want to build a team, it has to be built on mutual accountability. On a group of people who agree on the assignments, then hold each other accountable to complete those assignments together.

Trust isn't the prerequisite for building a team. Accountability is. We get this confused in our politics. We look for people we can trust or leaders try to convince us that we can trust them, when the greater need is to start with leaders who are willing to be held accountable.

In the church, at least, Jesus suggests that this path of accountability begins with a kind of downsizing. The disciples are told to shed their stuff - no purse, no bag, no sandals. Without a safety net they can't help but acknowledge that they need others to thrive. It's kind of the opposite message that our culture gives us - we are told to accumulate clothes and houses and money and insurance and stuff to protect us from misfortune.

Yet when we really need the support of others - concrete support - then we have an easier time acknowledging the underlying truth that our wellbeing depends on more than just protecting ourselves from each other. You cannot create community on your own.

I used to believe that to create community you had to be willing to give some things up. You know, give and take. Let go of having everything your way. And that's true. The disciples have to give up their creature comforts at home if they have any. They have to give up their control of knowing what they're going to eat, and where they are going to eat it. The hosts have to give up a measure of their own safety, the insecurity that comes from hosting guests you know little about.

But I think the disciples aren't told so much to give things up as they're admonished to show up confident that God's promises are sufficient for the encounter. To show up fully in the midst of strangers confident that God's promises are enough. Show up in all of their vulnerability confident that there can be a connection between the disciples and strangers who will hear their message, resonate with it, and join the Jesus team.

I suppose this kind of a Gospel assignment would be easier to receive if Jesus would assure us that everything would be all right. That this sort of radical vulnerability would be rewarded by the success of true healing that reaches deep into the heart of what ails people who are hurting; the success of more and more people actually living as though loving your neighbor all the time really was the most important way to live in the world; the success of less and less violence in our

streets, greater accountability in the center of power of our world from the White House on down; and the success of more and more people committed to working together for justice in our schools in our workplaces.

But though Jesus assures the 70 that nothing will hurt them and that their mission will surely succeed, we know this is not always true.

We know this from more than just experience. Jesus says as much in different places in Luke's Gospel. Just one chapter earlier, Luke has sent 12 disciples out two by two and they were not able to cast out demons. Later in Luke's Gospel Jesus tells the disciples that though they didn't need purses or bags when he sent them out with the 70, now they will need both and a sword as well. Things have changed and they won't be as safe as before. Perhaps they won't be as effective either.

In the wake of Luke's conflicting testimony, in the wisdom of our experience, we have to decide when to bring our vulnerability and when to hunker down. We have to decide when to travel light and when to carry a few other things to sustain us and protect us for the future. We have to decide when to trust the teams that we join and the people we encounter and when to hold back. There is no formula that can substitute for discernment for when and how to put ourselves out there for Christ's sake.

But here's what I know from Luke – the Gospel is most transformative when people are willing to show up full to live it. The church is most exciting, inviting, relevant, and righteously powerful when its people are willing to risk themselves for the message it bears. Your life and mine are most adventurous, real, and thrilling when we are able to come together across and with our differences, our sometimes not so subtle judgments of each other and strive for healing in the hurt that we all know and sometimes serve to create, strive for peace in the divisions that we know and sometimes serve to create, to fight for justice in the inequality that we know and sometimes benefit from, to announce that God's way is real and present and potent especially in a cynical time when there's skepticism about any kind of conviction.

And when that disciple life doesn't seem all that tempting to me. When I do doubt that this way toward connection is worth the risks, I remember again the risk that God takes to be in relationship with us. The risk that is laid out so poetically in the book of Hosea the prophet. There God laments that she has shown up – fully. God has given his full self to the people like a parent who give his child a name, teaches the child to walk, takes the child up into his arms, only to have that child reject the parent's love. And yet, in this Old Testament text God demonstrates the lengths that she is willing to go to engage again, not with wrath, not with anger that matches the violence of the people, but with compassion that grows warm and tender.

The persistent, insistent love of God reminding us again that our perfection is not the foundation of the church. It is the grace of God – the ground of our courage, the hope of our living, the basis for the team of God's people, the church.