

Seventy people Jesus sent on ahead of him. Seventy people, each with their individual stories of why they'd go, of why they'd do such a foolish thing, like do what Jesus says and be sent out like lambs in the midst of wolves. Jesus sent them in pairs, reminding me of Noah's story, when all seemed hopeless because of the wickedness of humankind and God had Noah collect all the animals he could in pairs. They'd then be part of restoring creation on earth after the flood. Jesus sent these ordinary people, not formal disciples, not after passing some sort of righteousness test, no. Because there was something in their story--some kind of passion or fire that called them to go and share that the kingdom of God is near. I wonder about what it was in their story that gave them no other choice but to go.

The gospel of Luke paints a picture of a people longing for a savior. We see this in Mary's singing about who this Jesus will be: *He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.* And Zechariah's prophecy: *He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.* Maybe these seventy people could relate to this longing. Maybe these seventy people were present for the Sermon on the Mount, heard Jesus' words: *Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God...Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.* Maybe these seventy saw Jesus' healings, saw demons leap out of people's bodies, saw Jesus hang out with the lowest of society. Maybe they witnessed hope, and in times of debt, despair and discrimination you can't just be healed and move on. You can't just witness transformation and move on. You now have a responsibility to go and share that the world can be different, and that it's not just about this savior Jesus, but that you have the capacity to bring this kingdom of God on earth, too. Maybe that's why those seventy people were willing to go out to a community with an unknown receptiveness--hospitality or hostility. That's quite a fire burning in their soul.

Now, as your brand new Associate Rector, you might be wondering what the fire burning in my soul is and why I, a Presbyterian pastor would even feel called by God to be here in the first place. You see, I'm pretty Presbyterian—my dad is a Presbyterian pastor, my grandfather was one too—but feeling called to a new place makes you reflect on your roots. To my knowledge, The whole reason my grandfather became Presbyterian was because of basketball. The local Presbyterian church had a basketball league, which of course he joined because he was quite a competitive guy. From there I guess he found more than competition, but a spiritual home. I never knew him, he died when my dad was in college, but that community must have taught him about Jesus and lit a fire within him for caring for people and building community. That's exactly what he did up until his death. My dad has that fire for working toward the kingdom of God on earth as a pastor in his community, and I've got that fire too, although it manifests a little differently in me than in them.

My fire started burning when out of an extended family of nine grandchildren I was the only girl. I noticed my family treating me differently, expecting certain gendered ways of being and that felt limiting to how God created me to be. As I grew older, I noticed that this wasn't just

an experience I had, but experiences of injustice extended toward other women, and other people based on their race, gender, sexuality, class, abilities and citizenship status. Through the story of Jesus' life, I met a God present in the margins, working towards liberation for all creation, and I felt empowered and called by this story. I couldn't just be changed and move on, I had to go and share the kingdom of God.

If I'm honest, though, after becoming a parent--you might have seen me with my baby Esther around--that even though I've got a fire burning stronger than ever before for the world she and others in her generation will inherit, I'm more afraid than I have been before. Not just of something happening to Esther or my spouse Ben, but of Esther growing up in our mess of the world. In a time of partisan-bickering, climate catastrophe, ripping apart families at the border, I could go on, but no matter where you are on the political spectrum, I think we can relate to being afraid in these times.

I bet the seventy people Jesus sent out were still afraid, even with the fire burning in their souls. But they had to go and share and work for change no matter how unwelcoming the communities they visited might be, no matter how overwhelmed they felt, how scared they were, how busy their lives felt. Going wasn't another task on their to-do list or obligation, it was the suddenly-life-only-makes-sense-if-I-go. And they must have realized that as they vacillated between fear and hope, they had their partner on the road, their community to back them up and together, there was enough hope to go around. Jesus won't be stopped.

When I drove away after my interview with the Associate Rector search committee, I sensed the fire of this church and I'm telling you--maybe this is obvious to you--but it was contagious. God has called us together now, and I'm here to be a partner with you on this path of discipleship--to walk with you in times of grief and hardship, to share the kingdom of God in our community, to seek to be faithful in these times, and to keep our fires burning. So as we begin this new phase in the life of St. Christopher's ministry, I want to know you: Where is your fire? What are your passions? How is God calling you? I promise if you share your fire with me, I will continue to share my fire with you, and together we will find the courage and the clarity to go wherever Jesus sends us-- together."

In the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Amen.