

I've been making arrangements with a seminary classmate to attend a faith-based educational festival this August in the mountains of North Carolina. Although folks are welcome to commute from hotels, the event is held at a large campground with the expectation that most participants will stay on site in tents or RVs. Of all my friends and acquaintances, I'm going with the outdoorsiest person I know. We are both backpackers, and both of us have camped out of canoes and kayaks, but all the summers I was working at Sequanota and Nawakwa—which are pretty cushy camps—she was working at Camp Kirchenwald, where there are no cabins, just lean-tos, and no dining hall, just a pavilion and picnic tables. Still, it didn't take much arm-twisting for me to convince her to spend the weekend glamping; that's *glamour-camping*. And though we did not splurge for one of the fully furnished air-conditioned tents, when we get there, after a seven hour drive, we can move our coolers, fans, lawn chairs, phone chargers, and camp cots with mattresses into a spacious tent that someone else already pitched that is reserved just for us. I'm sure my 20 year old self would have judged this a frivolous extravagance, but my current self, with my ergonomic pillow and monthly chiropractor appointment, is not willing to set out with no provisions or reservations, as Jesus once instructed his followers to go.

One of the underlying themes that runs all throughout Luke's gospel is the reversal of expectations: whether it is Jesus being born not to royalty in a palace but in a manger among shepherds, or parables about good Samaritans or leaving 99 sheep for one lost lamb, or Jesus dining with tax collectors instead of Pharisees, Luke consistently teaches us to flip our perspective. Yet, for all of scripture's efforts to train us for the unexpected, the church is not always great at new things. We respect tradition and are comforted by what is familiar. Most congregations value hospitality, but by that, we usually mean that we want people to feel welcome to come to us, to join in what we're already doing in the church. In today's gospel, Jesus sends his disciples *out*, to *receive* hospitality, into situations where they have to rely on the kindness of strangers. And he warns them *not* to anticipate unqualified success at each step of their mission.

The very act of sending the disciples out reverses the dynamic to which they'd become accustomed. By this point in his ministry, Jesus has attracted the attention of thousands; no matter where he goes, even when he tries to take time away by himself, the crowds find him, eager for healing or teaching or food. It's one thing for Jesus' followers to watch all those seekers approach them from their vantage point inside Jesus' entourage, where they ride on the coat-tails of Jesus' popularity and enjoy their proximity to his success. It's something else entirely for them to go out, only two at a time, to places where Jesus hasn't yet been and where Jesus anticipates some of them will not be welcome. Knowing they may not be warmly received, it's understandable, even wise and responsible, for them to take provisions, enough to at least pay their way if nobody offers to take care of their basic necessities; but Jesus instructs them to go without the means to be self-sufficient. They have something to offer: a

blessing of peace, a cure for the sick, the promise of the kingdom, but they will need to accept help as well as give it. Living together in the community Christ envisions is a two-way street.

This must be one of those passages that the church historically didn't read. If we look at traditional Christian missionary work, so much of which has been done with the colonialist mindset that we have something to take to others but that they have nothing of real value to share with us, we are not always very good guests in other people's homes. It can feel so much more comfortable to be the host who gets to graciously give, because that's a position of control; we don't like to be at the mercy of others, to admit we have much to learn or needs that someone else can meet, especially if they are different from us. But Jesus wants those who go on his behalf to be grateful guests, not just gracious hosts, to be curious learners, not just eager teachers. If you've ever made a meal that has received rave reviews, you know how good it feels to receive that feedback; so you can see why other cooks should get the chance to prepare their best recipes. Now apply that same logic to sharing the faith. We don't have a monopoly on God; we better be prepared to learn from the experiences of others before we expect them to learn from us. Jesus sends his followers to start conversations, not to give lectures.

That said, we shouldn't expect everyone we meet to be willing conversation partners; Jesus anticipated resistance when he sent the pairs out like lambs among wolves. Sharing love in a world that is enamored with hate is still a dangerous business, though that's the work to which we are called. Jesus seems pretty prickly when he instructs his advance teams to wipe off the dust in protest against the towns that aren't receptive; but in comparison, when a Samaritan town rejected Jesus, and James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy them, Jesus rebuked his vengeful disciples and told them to just move on. The love of God that turns our world upside down is still too much for some people to accept; Jesus tells us not to force it, but to keep on going, reassured that when we share God's grace the kingdom of God has come near, even if we don't get the obvious "results" that we want or expect. Even when the disciples think they have been successful, Jesus tells them not to rejoice in their perceived accomplishments but that they have participated in the life of the kingdom of heaven.

As individuals, or as the church, the safest and most comfortable thing we could do is stay home and hope that those who are yearning for the love of God come to us. The second safest thing we could do is step outside to engage others, but only from the porch of our own experience, under the awning of our own self-sufficiency. Yet Jesus calls us not to be safe but to be faithful, to go out, beyond where we are comfortable, to be guests and not always hosts, so we learn by relying on others. And sometimes we will encounter hostility instead of hospitality, but maybe the next one to go out after us meets a little less resistance because of what we've done. It is, after all, a big harvest, and there aren't that many labors who are willing to work under Jesus' merciful, selfless, loving leadership. May we not grow weary, but have faith that we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up on the work to which God calls us.