

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY



by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a Fourth of July symbol near an open bible and lighted candle at the center of your group. Take off your shoes and place them surrounding the bible and candle. Put your billfolds and purses with the shoes.

LEADER: It was for freedom that Christ freed us. So stand firm, and do not take on the yoke of slavery.

ALL: We remember we have been called to live in freedom.

LEADER: The whole law has its fulfillment in this one saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

ALL: We remember we have been called to live in freedom.

LEADER: Out of love place yourselves at one another's service.

ALL: Peace and mercy on all who follow this rule of life.

July 4th is a day for singing "America the Beautiful." Farmers are harvesting amber waves of grain beneath spacious skies in many parts of the country. Fittingly, in Sunday's gospel Jesus is sending workers out for the harvest of seeds he has planted in his preaching and healing.

It's summer. It's the Fourth. Families set out to camp and fish, eat hot dogs, and watch red, white, and blue fireworks cascade, explode, and spill down the dark night skies. Congregations plan services outdoors. Relatives gather for potluck picnics as they have for decades. Hometowns plan parades.

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson wrote and 56 members of the Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

Our traditions of places and picnics revive the value Americans place on freedom in much the same way Pope Francis talks about place in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. In describing creation as God's first book of revelation, Pope Francis insists,

"The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of our true selves" (84).

We visit the liberty bell and Independence Hall in Philadelphia. We walk the Freedom Trail past Paul Revere's house in Boston. We listen to the music from the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

On the Fourth Americans rise together to honor the flags that lead hometown parades. On most other days, we struggle to forge the nation and the vision the day celebrates.

We disagree about welcoming immigrants and about whose lives matter. Perhaps we don't talk politics or religion in order to keep our friends and keep peace in our families. Pope Francis urges us to include more than our own individual selves in the happiness we pursue.

● **For what about our nation are you grateful this 4th of July?**

GOSPEL



Jesus appoints missionaries.

NARRATOR: Jesus appointed 72 other missionaries and sent them in pairs ahead of him to every town and place he intended to visit.

JESUS: The harvest is rich but the workers are few. Therefore ask the master of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest. Go on your way. Remember, I am sending you as lambs in the midst of wolves. Do not carry a walking staff or traveling bag; wear no sandals and greet no one along the way. Whatever house you enter, say first:

MISSIONARY: Peace to this house.

JESUS: If anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the one house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you and cure the sick there. Say to them:

MISSIONARY: The reign of God has come near.

Luke 10.1-9

Missionaries announce God's kingdom.

Every time we pray the *Our Father*, Christians pray that God's kingdom will come. In Sunday's gospel Jesus sends out 72 missionaries to announce that the kingdom of God is at hand. A missionary is one who is sent to bring a message. The word *to send* in Greek is *apostlein*, from which we get the word *apostle*, *missionary*.

Jesus sends the 72 to bring God's kingdom to the people they meet, to bring them peace and healing in his stead. Their work is to spread the same message Luke has angels bring to the shepherds at Jesus' birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those God favors" (2.14).

The 72 are the third wave of workers to take up the harvest in Luke, a harvest that is rich

and ready. The 12 whom Jesus sends into the villages of Galilee to preach, heal, and cast out demons are the first wave of missionaries. They continue and extend Jesus' own mission of bringing the kingdom near (9.1-2).

The messengers Jesus sends ahead of him into Samaria in last Sunday's gospel are a second wave of missionaries. Luke calls them messengers although their explicit task is procuring lodging. In refusing to welcome Jesus as a guest, the Samaritans refuse to believe in him as well.

In this section of Luke, Jesus' mission and the mission of the early Church overlap like a double exposure in story form. In one exposure we see Jesus leading his disciples to Jerusalem, where he will suffer

and die. For Luke this journey is Jesus' exodus, his baptism, and his lifting up. He is going on from Jerusalem to God.

Double-exposed upon Luke's picture of Jesus' journey is the beginning of the Church's mission to bring God's healing nearness to the people of the world. The three waves of missionaries belong to this mission.

Only Luke describes Jesus sending out 72 missionaries in pairs. Only Luke finds the story of the Church inseparable from the story of Jesus' ministry and elaborates a second, companion volume to the gospel, his Acts of the Apostles. With the sending out of three waves of missionaries, Luke's gospel turns to the people of the nations and anticipates a future that includes us who read the gospel 2,000 years later.

● Who brought the good news of God's nearness to you? To whom have you handed it on?

Jesus asks of new disciples the same radical, itinerant way of life he models on the way to Jerusalem. His followers will have no place to lay their heads, no duties more important than preaching the gospel and bringing its healing power among the people, and no family ties deeper than the faith that unifies those who believe in Jesus and do God's will.

Jesus advises no walking staff, no traveling bag, no sandals, no visiting along the way. A disciple cannot possess much less than this. Any who imitate Jesus' lifestyle to this extent make a wholehearted commitment to preaching the gospel.

However, Jesus' rules presume local communities of Christians that welcome the radical, itinerant missionaries. The greeting "Peace to this house" is the test. Missionaries stay with anyone who reciprocates this greeting. Jesus requires that homeless missionaries, who depend for their daily bread on Christians with homes, eat and drink what their hosts provide.

In Acts, Luke describes such a community in Jerusalem, one whose members share common meals and property. The Christians in Antioch also form such a local community. Antioch is where Paul lived for three years after his conversion.

Christian tradition remembers other homes as important, too. For example, Peter's mother-in-law welcomes Jesus and his disciples to her home in Capernaum. Martha welcomes Jesus to her home. Perhaps Christian tradition remembers in these homes and the women who offer table service there other local communities of Christians or house churches.

Some Christian missionaries may have abused the hospitality of local families. Jesus' rules admonish apostles to stay in one house and eat what is set before them, not to move to homes with more to eat or better rooms.

Jesus insists firmly that laborers deserve pay. In return for preaching the gospel and healing the sick, the missionaries receive food, lodging, and perhaps clothes. They roam but they do not freelance. They labor in the same great harvest Jesus began.



In 1883 Mother Marianne Cope with five other Franciscan sisters became missionaries to people in Hawaii suffering from leprosy. A hospital administrator from Syracuse, New York, St. Marianne was canonized in 2012 for caring for people isolated for life on the Island of Molokai, taking over for Father Damien the Leper when he died.

● **What traditions of hospitality does your family extend to missionaries who bring others God's word?**

● **How have you benefited from knowing and hearing missionaries?**

Luke notes that Jesus sends the 72 out in pairs. This detail raises the question of whether the pairs were couples, men and

women dedicated to spreading the kingdom. Jesus' disciples include both men and women. The apostle Paul meets a married couple in Corinth named Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18.1-4). Like Paul, they are tentmakers. Paul lives with them. On the Sabbath Paul leads discussions in the synagogue. Priscilla and Aquila accompany Paul to Ephesus and settle there. We see they are apostles in Acts 18.26, when they take aside a new missionary and instruct him in Jesus' way.

In describing the three waves of missionaries who set out to continue Jesus' work, Luke makes clear that they bring to the nations real peace. They herald Jesus. Jesus, not Caesar Augustus, is the true savior of the world, the benefactor of humankind, and giver of peace.

● **What relationship do you have personally or as a parish with the Church's worldwide mission?**

● **What relationships might you benefit from building?**



God nurses Israel.

Sunday's first reading comes from the final chapter of the book of Isaiah, a book so important in Israel's history that prophecies from three different eras were added to the book.

First Isaiah prophesied from 742 to 700 B.C. His words form Isaiah 1-39. During his time Assyria defeated the northern kingdom of Israel, deported many of its citizens, and settled nonbelievers in its land. This Isaiah imagines all the nations of the earth streaming to Jerusalem to learn the law and a Spirit-filled ruler whose rule of justice and peace will reveal him as Emmanuel, God with us.

Second Isaiah spoke to the people of Israel in exile in Babylon about 540 B.C. His writings form Isaiah 40-55. He called exiled Israelites to go home from Babylon and rebuild their community. He promised God would make a highway through the desert as once God opened a dry path through the sea.

Third Isaiah is a prophet of Israel's rebuilding after their return from exile. In Sunday's reading he describes Jerusalem

and its temple as a nursing and nurturing mother that reveals God's presence. The second temple becomes a place that helps the people recover their religious identity.

God restores Jerusalem.

Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her, you who love her. Exult, exult with her, you who mourn over her—that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breasts, that you may drink deeply with delight from her abundant breasts.

For thus says God: I will spread prosperity over her like a river, and the wealth of nations like an overflowing torrent. You shall nurse, be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

You shall see and your hearts shall rejoice, and your bodies flourish like the grass. It shall be known that God's hand is with God's servants.

Isaiah 66.10-14

- What nourishment do you draw from Isaiah's vision of Jerusalem as a mother?
- What is a place that nourishes who you are?

PRAY

Identify a goal or destination at which you want to arrive this week. Share it with your group.

LEADER: Let us extend our hands and bless our shoes, billfolds, and bags. Loving God, bless our walking forth into the world to work for the freedom of all.

ALL: May we bring the peace and healing of Jesus Christ with us on our way.

LEADER: Bless our resources for giving comfort and bringing justice in our path.

ALL: May we bring the peace and healing of Jesus Christ with us on our way. Amen.



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Online Retreats

If you are going on vacation, take an online retreat along. Refresh your soul as well as your body. Go to goodgroundpress.com and click on online retreats at the right of the page.

DO SOMETHING



- Find ways to learn about the missions your diocese sponsors.
- Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was started in 1943 by the U.S. Bishops in response to the refuge crisis after World War II. Today CRS is often first on the ground when tragedy strikes both abroad and in the U.S. Go to crs.org to learn ways to support their works of mercy.