

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Living in Ordinary Time: Love More, Hate Less”  
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Psalm 82, Luke 10:17-24

It was the original Mission Impossible. Jesus had sent seventy of his followers out on an impossible mission. Their mission, which they chose to accept, was to go throughout Judea and essentially tell people to love more and hate less. They were to go ahead of Jesus and offer the people of Judea the very peace of God. The peace of God that is possible regardless of the circumstances. And this mission was seemingly impossible because, as I explained last week, the people of Judea were in no mood to hear it. They were filled with anger and hatred toward their Roman oppressors and their Jewish lackeys. They were filled with hate because Rome and its allies were introducing a culture which was diametrically opposed to that of observant Jews. They were filled with hate because Rome and its allies were buying up all of the agricultural land and making people refugees. They were filled with hate because Rome taxed the people for the benefit of Rome and not for the local populous. And so it was into this moment of rising hatred and rebellion that the disciples went with a message of peace; of love more, of hate less.

What is remarkable about this story is that it would appear that they were successful. They return to Jesus all pumped up, filled with joy, saying, “Look Jesus even the demons submitted to us!” Meaning that the demonic forces of hate and anger had given way to the very peace of God, to the love that God had to offer. Jesus’ response was right in-line with their excitement. He said, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a bolt of lightning. See, I have given you the authority to tread on snakes and scorpions as well as over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.” Jesus then reminded them that their names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, in heaven itself. Who could ask for more? Who could ask for a greater victory. Let’s hang the championship banner, bring out the band and have a parade. Victory is ours, they seem to say. We can now retire because all is well with the world. Unfortunately, there is only one thing wrong with all of this...and that is, well, the last two-thousand years. For the last two-thousand years appear to have been about more hate and less love.

The last two-thousand years have seen hatred turn into mind-numbing violence. We have witnessed wars of conquest in the name of religion, national pride and ideology. We have witnessed genocide over and over again in every continent, driven by hatred of the other; of those we see as inferior or as a threat. We have watched the industrialization of slavery and the denigration of entire races of people because of the color of their skin. And even when we think like the disciples that we can celebrate because somehow we are beyond that, we are brought back to reality in the present moment. We are brought back by the death of five Dallas police officers who were killed because they were white policemen. We are brought back by the shooting of a Muslim physician on his way to

prayers, the beating of two Muslim youth outside their mosque and the painting of the words, go home terrorist on a Muslim woman's car. We are brought back by the attack of ISIS inspired slaughters of LGBTQ persons, and other innocent Americans in similar attacks. We are brought back by the often unjustified killings of people of color. We are brought back by anti-immigrant attacks in Great Britain following the Brexit. We are brought back by Buddhist attacks on Muslims in Myanmar. We are brought back by the attack of Palestinians on Jews in Israel...and of ultra-Orthodox Jews on Palestinians and on their own soldiers. We are reminded that in this world there often seems to be more hate and less love.

So what, we might ask, could Jesus and his disciples have been thinking when they were celebrating two-thousand years ago? What they were actually thinking and saying was that while they may have achieved a few small victories, the need for their proclamation was going to continue. I say this because all of the language in this story points us to the future, even though the church may have wanted to see it as pointing to the past. When the disciples returned they spoke of demons submitting using language that implies it will continue to happen...not just that it happened in the past. When Jesus says he saw Satan fall, he is speaking of continuing action, that Satan, that evil, may be down but it's not out. When Jesus says he has given the disciples power, it is a reference to power that is intended for use in the future as they continue their mission to proclaim more love and less hate. Jesus understood that the mission was just beginning. He would still need to go to the cross to break the powers of sin and death. He knew that a new community based on more love and less hate would need to be created. He knew that he would have to send the Spirit in order to empower this mission. It was not over; it was just beginning.

Unfortunately, what happened was that the church forgot its main mission; the mission of the seventy; the mission to invite all persons into the Kingdom of God centered in Jesus Christ, who offers us peace and where there is to be more love and less hate. Instead we got busy seeking power and privilege. Instead we spiritualized our faith such that heaven mattered and earth didn't. Instead we found it easier to hate than to love; to condemn rather than to forgive. And so if there was ever a moment in recent memory when we need to remember; when we need the seventy, this is it. In a time in which the shrill voices of hate seem to be all around us. In a time when love seems to be in short supply. We need to remember. We need the seventy. So where will we find them? Since you asked I will tell you. First, look at the person sitting next to you or near you. Second, say to them, "Hi I'm one of the seventy." Yes, you and I, we are the seventy. We are those who are being sent on what seems like an impossible mission to teach more love and less hate. To offer the peace of God to all. And even though this may seem like a mission impossible, it is not. We know it is not, not only because of the disciples' success, but because we know that love of God is the most powerful force on the face of the earth. It has the power to change lives, nations and the world.

That then is our task. It is to show in word and deed more love and less hate. My challenge to you then is this, to ask yourselves, "How am I, in word and in deed, proclaiming to the world more love and less hate, such that people will want to be a part of God's new kingdom of peace.