

4th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
July 6, 2025

Earlier this week I reread the Declaration of Independence. All of it. Not just the opening paragraphs. It's not very long, and I commend it to you. You can find it on the National Archives website.

Reading it gave me a perspective I needed. For some months now, when I hear about and reflect on this country today I find myself either angry or deep in grief.

Angry particularly when I see the cruelty described in the headlines.

Grieving when I feel the loss of focus on living into the aspirations that are described in the Declaration.

Apparently these truths are no longer self-evident.

You may have different emotions in response to the changes happening in the United States; and we all have different specific issues about which we care deeply. I respect the variety of responses and passions represented among us and I want to hear about what is concerning you; but I want to address not the particulars, but how today's scriptures may equip us to respond, and engage in a public life of faith. . .

Alas, because I approached them from a place of my emotions, when I turned to the lessons appointed, I entered into the temptation to proof text, to find the verse or clause or phrase that would express my response to what's in the news.

Some examples:

"Weeping may spend the night but joy comes in the morning." Reassuring! but it doesn't apply if you read the news over breakfast.

"God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow" seemed a good possibility, which could be applied to all government leaders, whatever their positions, their actions or inactions, as well as to ourselves...

"I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." We could do something with that, I thought.

But would any one of these ripped from their context be truly helpful?

So I pulled back from looking for **the** verse, and decided to focus on the gospel lesson as a whole. What clues might there be for those of us who struggle with how we live as messengers of Christ and agents of the reign of God in these times and this place.

Much commentary on this passage from Luke parses Jesus's instructions to the seventy. What could be the meaning of each of the things which he cautions them to leave behind?. Paraphrases

strive to translate for today sandals (sneakers, hiking boots), bag (backpack, suitcase) and purse (cash or credit or a phone with venmo) to make them relevant. But taken together, the absence of all these things suggests one thing - vulnerability.

It's not just the things we can't let go of, as Stephen spoke about a few weeks ago, it's the things in our lives that give us a false sense of invulnerability.

When I went to see the Red Sox a couple of weeks ago I took my cane. Turns out I didn't need it, because there were handrails along the stairs in our section at Oracle Park (unlike some of the sections at the Coliseum which I used to frequent). So I forgot it when I left until deep in the crush of exiting, with no easy way to turn back to get it. When I decided to join others from the Interfaith Fast on Wednesday at Courthouse Square, I suddenly felt the need of a cane. I don't need one to walk, but it's handy to lean on, or sometimes to make a little space for myself when a crowd is just too much. New cane in hand I did not feel so vulnerable.

I wonder what things might be a hedge against vulnerability for you?

For the seventy, without their things, without comforts or means, each was dependent on the kindness and hospitality of strangers and the support of their traveling partner. That's all there was. .

In a world dominated by the power of Rome - by the principalities and powers to which the message of the Jesus movement is a direct challenge - in that world of the first century Eastern Mediterranean, society was formed by those who used their power to shape it in their own self-interest. In such a milieu, to make oneself vulnerable is dangerous, perhaps even profoundly foolish.

It isn't much different today when elected officials are willing to compromise their principles to retain power - to secure re-election, to avoid being vulnerable to a primary challenge. Vulnerability is equated with weakness, then and now.

And awareness of one's vulnerability is an issue, can leave people open to anxiety. Consider that in a recent UCLA poll the top goal of 10 - 24 year olds in the US who were surveyed was "to be safe." This makes me very sad. But is it surprising when you add up the impact of school shootings on this generation, the financial uncertainty they face, the looming climate crisis, and the scars of the COVID pandemic?

<https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/generation-z-wants-to-be-safe-ucla-study-finds>

I do not mean to diminish or demean the fact that many situations and conditions make some among us particularly vulnerable. Children always. But for those of us who can risk, what does it mean for us to embrace our vulnerability? even to lead with it as Jesus urged?

Two more notes from this story of sending the seventy.

Where were the duos instructed to go? First house to house, that is, into the private and familial spaces of people's lives. In most cases this would mean the household of an extended family - multiple generations and perhaps a slave or servant. Or occasionally a larger household, multiple generations of related folks, plus slaves, employees, and even the workshops of the family and an additional craftsperson or two. Still, people who were intimately connected economically if not genetically, and living as with the loyalties of kinship. These were the situations into which the seventy were sent.

If that didn't work, Jesus's instruction was to go out into the streets. One social science commentary suggests that a better translation here might be squares. Take the message out into the public squares, the intersections, the spaces where all people gather regardless of status, wealth, or relatedness. Take yourselves to where all people are free to come together and hear the message.

Two weeks ago Stephen reminded us that in our baptismal covenant we promise to persevere in resisting evil (and whenever we sin repent and return to the Lord).

On Thursday Religion News Service posted an opinion piece by Sean, our presiding bishop, entitled "Once the church of presidents, the Episcopal Church must now be an engine of resistance." He reminds us that in our resistance we must not fall into the trap of categorizing and further polarization, but "see beyond the limitations of our tradition and respond not in partisan terms, but as Christians who seek to practice our faith fully in a free and fair democracy."

<https://religionnews.com/2025/07/03/once-the-church-of-presidents-the-episcopal-church-must-now-be-an-engine-of-resistance/>

And that leads into the second note I want to make about the sending of the seventy. Their message was for everyone.

The reign of God has come near.

Whether they hear you or not, whether they like it or not, whether they say yes or no, announce to everyone that the reign of God has come near. These were their instructions.

Over the last few days in my social media scrolls I've noticed others pondering, as I have done, how we do this. How do we live out the message that the reign of God has come near? How do we begin? How do we resist?

I know many of you have been attending various events. I have to admit that I really don't like massive marches and protests because I don't do well in crowds. But I did go to the Square on

Wednesday, joining with others from Incarnation. And I have participated from time to time over the last 60 plus years.

In the late 90s I was part of an interfaith march through downtown Los Angeles. The LAPD requires marshals, and I got to be one. It was great because I got to be the marshal who brought up the rear - room to breathe. Also at the rear was a hero of the faith, with a cane! Dr. James Lawson, a Methodist pastor who as a very young missionary had studied with Gandhi, later organizing lunch counter sit-ins, and working at training others in risky methods of nonviolent resistance throughout the Civil Rights movement and for decades until his death last year.

I was reminded of Jim Lawson when he was mentioned in an article about Erica Chenoweth, professor at the Kennedy School at Harvard, who has studied and quantified the effectiveness of large scale civil resistance.

<https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2025/07/erica-chenoweth-democracy-data-harvard>

Skeptical of whether some of what they have learned about mass actions continues to apply, Chenoweth noted that Lawson was a mentor for her because of his patience and persistence in working one on one. Lawson's effectiveness was a result of hours, weeks, and months of listening to people in their homes and in the community.

Might it be the case that our resistance now requires our listening?

With vulnerability, in the private and public spaces, with a message for all - no exceptions - might it be that to be effective in witness to our faith we must first listen, and hear the concerns and hopes our neighbors have for a more life-giving, loving, and just community and nation?