

I remember the first time I pumped the gas at a filling station. I was with Sue's family – we were passing through Lyons, Colorado – a little village right at the base of the foothills of the Rockies. Sue's dad pulled into a place called, U Pump It. And we did. I remember wondering whether this gas would be inferior but her dad's old Buick Electra made the uphill climb into the mountains just fine. Now I had grown up on a farm – we had our own supply of gasoline so I was used to pumping gas, but never at a filling station until that day. Little did I imagine that day that the days of my having someone pump gas for me were almost over.

Once upon a time the sermon based on the gospel for today would have been a pitch for money. Jesus appointed seventy to go out and proclaim the Kingdom of God. They were to take nothing for their journey – no purse, no bag, not even sandals. They were to depend on the people they were preaching to. When I was young the sermon would then have become a sermon about supporting missionaries who were in Africa and New Guinea and in Japan, proclaiming Jesus. Missionaries are the ones winning people for Christ. Pray for them, give money to support them.

But times have changed. The other night I listened to someone who worships here tell about coming to faith in Jesus. He did not speak about a missionary or a preacher telling him about Jesus. He told about a friend. He was facing a challenging time in his life and this friend invited him into faith in Jesus. His story was not of Africa or China but of a worker in God's harvest who never left home – who spoke of Jesus right here in Lorain County. The witness of this friend changed his life.

Times are changing. This past week three adults and seven youth from this congregation were in Brooklyn, NY caring and sharing their time and talents to witness to the love of Christ. The kingdom of God came near as they brought smiles and help to those who before this week were strangers. In many congregations older adults have ventured on mission trips of their own, bringing the love of God to those who have faced disaster.

Times are changing. Today members of this congregation will take bread and wine and extend the meal that we know as the Lord's Supper. They will carry Christ's Body and Blood to many you know – older members of the congregation who have difficulty getting out. There was a time when I was the one who did all home communion visits. Now I visit every third month with volunteers visiting the other two.

So today I will not be making a pitch for money so that you can support someone to go to spread the word of Christ. Instead I invite you to be one of the laborers who brings the kingdom of God near.

Next door there is someone who is facing a tough time. Maybe she is afraid of what this world is coming to – afraid of neighbors who may take out a gun and shoot because there was too much noise. What can you say to her? Should you join in the fear? Or should you invite her to trust in Jesus? Can the peace of God come to her through you?

Someone who normally is here is missing today. Has illness struck? Does he need someone to come and pray with him – someone to remind him that Christ will be with him through this time? Jesus will give you the words you will need. Pray and ask Jesus. Go and see the one who could not be here.

Or maybe all that you are able to do is to send a card and a note. How many times I have heard people say how much it meant to them to have someone take the time to let them know they are not alone.

There is an interesting phrase in our gospel reading for today. Jesus sent thirty-five pairs of people to every town and place where he himself intended to go. Think about it – did Jesus make it to every place the thirty-five pairs of witnesses went? I doubt that he made a physical visit to each of those places. But through his Spirit working in his followers Jesus does go every place you go and witness to him. You are the body of Christ – you are the apostle that is sent by Jesus into every place you will be this week. At work – at play – in your home – down the street- in the coffee shop or the grocery store God's kingdom will come near as you share the love and the hope that is in Jesus. Jesus himself will be present through you.

Today it hardly seems possible that once other people pumped the gas for me when I filled up my car. I hope that someday it will hardly seem possible that once Christians mostly thought of mission as belonging to missionaries. I hope that you will be so caught up in Christ's mission of love and forgiveness and hope and peace that Christ will visit every place you go. Amen.