

SERMON Holy Troublemaker – Alice Paul
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Galatians 6: 1-6. 9-10

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads. Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever 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 is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near."

'Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.'

The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

SERMON Holy Troublemaker – Alice Paul

Jesus is sending his followers into the towns and villages ahead of him, sending them to spread his message. He equips them with the power to cast out demons and to cure diseases, and with the words to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Only this time, Jesus is not sending just the twelve apostles. This time he is sending many more, seventy. Jesus is commissioning a whole host of others who had been listening to his teachings, watching him heal, or being healed themselves. Jesus is sending his followers out in pairs so that they could support each other.

Jesus' mission is to bring God's love to the world. He needs more than twelve men to share his message. So he is sending others. This time it's men and likely women as well. After all, Jesus was supportive of women. Women were his followers. Women were already providing for him and his ministry financially. So why not send women?

The Seventy would be going out into the world because Jesus message was for everyone. The world was ripe to receive Jesus' radical love. Jesus knew that harvest would be plentiful, that they were innumerable people open to his message of inclusion, healing and love. But Jesus needed laborers – those willing to go.

And he expected them to be humble, to be vulnerable. Jesus told the Seventy to take nothing with them – no money, no luggage, no extra shoes. Jesus expected them to rely on the hospitality of strangers; eating and drinking whatever was offered to them by the people who welcomed them. His followers would do as he was doing, share the table and break bread with countless individuals.

Jesus told his followers to cast out demons, to heal and to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was near or, translated differently, the Kingdom of God is "at hand" – present in that moment, in that time and in that place. The kingdom of God was present in the community that was being formed in the giving and the receiving. The kingdom of God is present in communities where there is

A willingness to be vulnerable and to trust another- to not rely one's possessions.
A willingness to welcome and break bread with another, with strangers – putting aside dietary restrictions and other barriers - to accept hospitality.
Healing from illness and demons; healing from whatever oppresses people.
And Peace – not the uneasy peace that follows war - but the deep peace of Jesus.

These are attributes of the Kingdom of God. These are what the 70 were called to share. And after returning from their mission, the Seventy were joyful in their successes and being able to cast out demons. Jesus warned them not to rejoice at their power but to rejoice that God knows what they are doing in Jesus name.

Paul, in his letter to the early church in Galatia, is reminding the people of what it means to live as Jesus' followers and act in the name of Jesus. Paul knew that there was division in the church of the Galatians. His letter is actually a reprimand and a reminder to the Galatians of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Paul tells them following Jesus does not mean that one has to first become Jewish or be circumcised or adhere to a specific diet. No, Paul reminds them that the church is not supposed to set up its own requirements for people to join. The requirement is the desire to follow Jesus, to welcome others who want to be followers, and to live the example of Jesus. Paul exhorts them to act in humility and to serve others. As followers of Jesus, they and we are called to -

Bear one another's burdens, to fulfil the Christ's law of love.

To **“not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.”**

And **whenever we have an opportunity, we are to work for the good of all.**

Living these actions, applies to the life of Alice Paul, who is the first person I want to tell you about from the book, “Holy Troublemakers and Unconventional Saints,” by Daneen Aker. It is the book we are using for our sermon series this summer. Now, you will not find Alice listed as a candidate for sainthood in a church. But she was unconventional for her time. And she caused enough holy trouble to get herself arrested.

You see, Alice was a suffragette, a woman dedicated to getting women the right to vote – not just in local elections but nationally. She was the daughter of Quaker parents and had been raised to believe in equal rights for all people – especially those who were in the minority or denied their rights. This included the right of

women to be able to vote. While countless women had been fighting for that right, they initially tried to achieve it by being polite and lady-like.

But Alice, who had gone to school and received a PhD in social work, decided to go to England to learn more about English women's work to obtain the right to vote. There she met another American woman who, with Alice, founded the National Women's Party.

Alice believed that women had to do more than politely ask for their rights. She believed they "needed to make some noise" which included "sustained, dramatic, nonviolent protests." Alice arranged the first large protest in Washington DC the day before the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson in 1913. She worked diligently to get permission for the march despite reluctant and resistant authorities. That day, 8,000 women marched and rode on floats from Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capital to the White House. And some 500,000 watched. It was called "one of the most impressively beautiful spectacles ever staged in this country."

Then in 1917, when women still did not have the right to vote, Alice and 1000 women protested by picketing the White House. They called themselves "Silent Sentinels." They held signs like the one that said, "Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty?" Protesters were verbally and sometimes physically attacked and not protected by police. Despite the demonstration being peaceful, the police arrested some of the women, including Alice. She was sentenced to prison for 7 months. The jail was rat infested. The women were sometimes beaten. But what kept Alice going was an inscription on a prison wall, "Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God." Alice recognized her work, even from jail, as her calling. She was doing the will of God.

While in prison, Alice protested the conditions there by going on a hunger strike. At one point the prison authorities tried to force feed her and threatened to send her to a hospital for the insane. However she and other prisoners were able to leak the story of the conditions at the prison and what was happening to them to the press. Their plight and fight became news. The public became aware.

Meanwhile, the Silent Sentinels had continued their protest at the White House until the 19th Amendment was passed and women were granted the right to vote. After the amendment, Alice continued to advocate for women's equality.

Bearing another's burden. Working for the good of others. Not growing weary and not giving up. These words of Paul epitomized Alice's life and fight for the rights of women.

As we recall stories of Jesus' interactions with women – engaging the Samaritan woman at the well, rescuing the woman who would have been stoned for committing adultery but Jesus told those who accused her they could only cast the first stone if they were sinless, acknowledging the faith of the woman who touched his garment to be healed, and many others – we trust that Alice was doing the work of Jesus when advocating for women. But Alice did not work alone. Others worked tirelessly with her and around her.

Jesus did not send the Seventy out alone. He sent them in pairs. He encouraged them to build community. Because that's what brings the kingdom near. And Paul reminded the Galatians that the way of following Jesus required working together not setting up roadblocks.

Whether we are talking about two thousand years ago, 100 years ago, or today, followers of Jesus still need to hear his words for bringing the Kingdom of God near "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way." That work still requires the laborers to work together – not making rules that exclude those who want to follow Jesus, but rather welcoming one another in Jesus' name and bearing another's burden, working for the good of others, not growing weary and not giving up.

Now, not everyone will go to the extremes that Alice did. How we choose to build the kingdom, only we can decide. But we may need to raise a little holy trouble, disrupting the status quo, being a little unconventional and supporting those whom society rejects or oppresses – those whom Jesus would support. Jesus even told the Seventy that they would not be accepted by everyone. But he did not tell them to become hostile or quarrel or hate. Rather he told them to simply leave and wipe the dust off their feet while saying "The Kingdom of God is near."

But when Jesus' followers actually come together as a community to welcome all, to bring healing rather than division, to work for peace, and to demonstrate Jesus' inclusive and radical love, we see the Kingdom of God at hand. At least we see a

little piece of it. So let us work for the good of all. Let us bear one another's burdens. Let us not grow weary. And let us not lose hope.