

Our American Declaration of Independence boldly claims our right to the pursuit of happiness, which is probably why we chose the name *Chase* for one of our biggest banks. In Chicago, the chase begins where the Declaration ends, with the name John Hancock, adorning the landmark building at the head of the Magnificent Mile. And what makes this mile so magnificent? It's the purses, the bags, and the sandals. It's the people you see on the road. It's the restaurants where you can eat whatever you want. It's the pulse of life, the vast liberty of endless choices, the countless, well-designed aisles for the pursuit of happiness. Basically, it's everything that Jesus denies the seventy he sends ahead of him.

*Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.  
Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide...eat what is set before you.  
Do not move about from house to house.  
Cure the sick who are there.*

Try that strategy on Michigan Avenue sometime.

Jesus' instructions to the seventy flip everything we assume on its head, including the opening premise. For Jesus, we are not pursuing happiness. If anything, happiness is pursuing us. Instead of naming it *happiness*, as Jefferson did, Jesus calls what we are endlessly longing for and chasing after with all our being *the kingdom of God*. And rather than encouraging us to pursue it, Jesus says it is pursuing us, and that *the kingdom of God has come near*. To tell the world this, to share this surprise of good news with a grasping, chasing humanity, Jesus appoints seventy people and sends them forth in pairs with an announcement of peace. Whether these messengers are embraced or rejected, the kingdom of God has come near. Whether we welcome it or not, what we are chasing has come chasing after us.

Where have you seen the kingdom of God come near to you this week?  
Who has been sent to you with a word of surprising good news?  
Who has come offering peace, needing what you can provide and proclaiming what you pursue?  
Let's be honest: in this gospel story, we are not the seventy who are sent.  
We can't get people to attend the Lakeview Action Coalition assembly for an hour and a half on a weeknight, much less go out into the world at the mercy of the wolves in the name of Jesus.

We tend to be a congregation of big ideas and small work ethic, happy to write a check or make a suggestion but loathe to relinquish control or to leave behind our stuff or speak to strangers about the movement of God in the world.

We'll share the peace with each other in here but precious few of us work for real peace in the real world.

We might pray in silent at home for sick people on the list but never out loud in public for any reason--isn't that what we pay the pastor for?

We are surrounded by neighbors but invite precious few of them into our worshipping community; *the harvest is plentiful here but the laborers are few.*

Did any of you have a demon submit to you this week?

We are the sick ones, infected with individualism and suffering deeply from the effects of a cancerous consumerism that we cannot seem to cure ourselves.

In this gospel text, we are the ones Jesus wants to reach, with far more resources for his mission than desire to step out and do it.

And yet, let's be honest.

We are the seventy others who are sent.

In Luke's count there were twelve disciples but seventy apostles, a word that means *sent ones*.

Seventy is a biblical word that means everybody; it is the number of elders gathered to help an overworked Moses and the traditional biblical count of nations in the world.

All of us who are baptized are commissioned, in the words of our liturgy, into *giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world.*

We go out into the world every week with the peace we have received here from Jesus, with the good news that God's kingdom has come so near we can break it and pour it and taste it, and every Sunday we have the opportunity to return to him with joy.

So what's your missionary report this week?

What excited you?

What in Jesus' name went well?

What victories do you have to celebrate, what new welcomes and success stories do you have to share?

What good news do you have for Jesus?

Who rejected your peace, and who listened, and whose life did you make better and how?

As the vanguard of the truest happiness, as a representative of the kingdom of God, whom did you pursue?

Whatever your answers to these questions, if you have any, *do not rejoice at this.*

Do not rejoice at what you have accomplished, or at the power you are surprised to learn that you have.

And while we're at it, there are plenty of other reasons not to rejoice.

Do not rejoice in the stuff you have accumulated, in your bags or purses or sandals.

Even if you love them, they do not love you.

Do not rejoice in the approval of others; if everyone welcomes you, you're obviously not an ambassador for the kingdom of God.

Do not rejoice in your freedom of choice; just eat whatever is set before you because enduring joy does not come from changing circumstances.

Do not rejoice in your glorious past, or weep for it either; the prophet says that God's comfort for once glorious, now suffering Jerusalem is not in yesterday's glory but in tomorrow's.

And Jesus takes the same approach with the seventy: the reason to rejoice now is the security of your future in heaven, where Satan has been evicted but your names have been written in permanent marker.

Rejoice now in the certainty of a joyful someday, happiness no longer chased but captured, the kingdom of God no longer coming near but finally capturing us, because it will.

Encouraged by Isaiah and Jesus, we therefore prepare for life then by practicing it now.

We celebrate early, and we live already the way we are promised things will be.

We rejoice now in the comfort of still restless Jerusalem, and we march into a violent world with a crazy confidence and a word of peace.

And Jesus reminds us to do so together with hands that are empty and open.

After so much time lugging our baggage on Michigan Avenue, we need the practice.

Because someday the promise will come true--someday the kingdom will come so near to us that we will die.

At that point we will be sent ahead with no purse, no bag, no sandals, and no credit cards.

We will show up at God's house and hope to be welcomed.

We will eat whatever is set before us.

And we will like it.