

Send us out, O Lord, two by two, to bear each other's burdens and to bear witness to your love, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Jesus was nobody's fool;
 Jesus knew it's a jungle out there.
So when he sent the disciples out,
 not only did he send them two by two –
 presumably for the sake of safety -
 but he also warned them that he was sending them out
 like lambs in the midst of wolves,
 and cautioned them that some people
 simply wouldn't want to hear what they came to say.

Well, it's still a jungle out there, isn't it?
It's a jungle wherever children kill other children in grade school.
It's a jungle – even on this day when we celebrate freedom and peace –
 but it's still a jungle out there
 when the task of some of our very best minds
 is to build increasingly destructive weapons of war.
It's a jungle where pockets of immeasurable wealth
 stare directly at blankets of aching poverty.

And those of us who are trying to live as faithful Christians
 know it's a jungle when schools schedule soccer games
 and bosses expect us to work
 on Sunday morning -
 the time we set aside for prayers.
And we're being told - increasingly -
 not only when we can't pray,
 but also where we can't pray.

Back when I was the Chaplain at Trinity College,
I had the pleasure of acting as host every Spring to Honors Day,
 that wonderful ceremony when students are recognized
 for work well done.

Honors Days, at least as legend had it,
was always in the Chapel.

Well, one Spring, the word came from the College President's office
that this year there would be no Invocation or Blessing at Honors Day.
In other words, prayer was not going to be permitted – *in the Chapel*.
I 'suggested' that as long as I was the Chaplain - and could still breathe -
there would not be events in the Chapel
at which prayer was not permitted,
and we did indeed pray.

It really is a jungle out there.
And Jesus knew it;
Jesus was nobody's fool.

And yet, for all that Jesus was a realist,
the marching orders that He gave to his disciples
do seem to exude a certain naiveté, don't you think?
Surely it takes a boat-load of naiveté
to set forth on a journey to who-knows-where
with no purse, no bag, no sandals,
heading into what may well be a hostile environment,
and trusting that others will provide whatever is needed?

And yet, those marching orders were remarkably clear, weren't they -
I would say they were even uncharacteristically clear.
In everything Jesus taught and preached,
nowhere did He offer a detailed plan for the Church,
and instituted only the rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper
for the Church.

But when he sent out those disciples,
he was very precise.
Go in pairs; go to every town;
don't take anything with you.
When you get there, offer my Peace,
And, if they don't welcome you, don't hang around.

But, ... for all that the job was clear, nobody said it was easy.
It really is a jungle out there.

And then, St. Paul, as we heard in today's reading from Galatians,
makes it even more difficult
by telling us to bear one another's burdens.

I'm not exactly sure what it means to bear one another's burdens,
but I do know that all of us, from time to time,
are confronted with burdens too heavy to bear alone.
That's when we look to others to help us.

Think, for example of the time of a death in the family.
We all know how the mass of
physical and emotional and mental and spiritual and social strains
conspire to weigh a person down at such a time.
I expect that we've all ministered to people at that particular time.
They can't keep their minds on what needs to be done,
so simple ordinary things like preparing meals become overwhelming.

So what happens?
Neighbors ask: 'what can we do?'.
Friends volunteer: 'let me do your telephoning;
we'll bring in your dinner tonight;
I'll do your shopping and pick up your dry cleaning.'
They expect, at least for a time, to bear someone else's burden.

The author Frederick Buechner tells a story about himself -
a really poignant story about bearing one another's burdens.
Let me quote his very own words.

"It was an especially dark time of my life.
One of my children was sick,
and in my anxiety for her I was in my own way as sick as she was.

Then one day the phone rang,
and it was a friend who lived some 800 miles away.
I assumed that he was calling from his distant home
to inquire how things were,
but no, he wasn't at home at all,
but at an inn about twenty minutes away.
He'd known I was having troubles, he said,
and he thought maybe it would be handy

to have an extra friend around for a day or two.

The reason he didn't tell me in advance that he was coming
must have been that he knew I would tell him for Heaven's sake
not to do anything so crazy,
so for Heaven's sake he did something crazier still
which was to come those 800 miles without telling me was coming
so that for all he knew I might not even have been there.

But as luck would have it, I was there,
and for a day or two he was there with me.

I have never forgotten how he came all that distance,
and I'm sure he has never forgotten it either.

As far as I can remember we never so much as mentioned the name of Christ. But
as we walked and talked and breathed in and out,
I believe that for a little time
we both of us touched the hem of Christ's garment
and were both, for a little time anyway, healed."

What I hear in that story – and others like it -
is that when Jesus sends us out,
He sends us first to the place where people are hurting.
It is a jungle out there,
and Jesus sends us into the very thicket of that jungle
to bear one another's burdens
because that's where we're most likely to welcome the news
that the Kingdom of God is near.

The questions for us modern day disciples, it seems to me, are:
where is the greatest pain in this community,
and how can that place also be the place
where burdens are shared
and people are healed
and the Kingdom is proclaimed and welcomed?

Jesus Christ shared our burden -
the crushing and destructive burden of our sin -
that we might be healed
and to bring God's Kingdom.

And we who have been baptized in his name

have promised to follow that example.

And Jesus was nobody's fool.
Jesus knows that this ministry can be really hard.
But he did send us out to do it;
 he sent all of us who are baptized in his name.
This 'jungle' ministry belongs to us all,
 and until the whole world shares this ministry,
 the laborers are too few.

But the harvest is plentiful.
It really works, this ministry Jesus gives us,
 of bearing one another's burdens
 so that the world will encounter the Kingdom of God.
That's why Jesus lived - and died -
 so that our burdens would be carried
 and that the Kingdom would come near.

Someone once asked the great preacher Phillips Brooks
 why he was a Christian.
Brooks pondered the question for a moment and then replied
 that he was a Christian
 because of his aunt who lived in Teaneck, New Jersey.

Someone else once said that a Christian is someone who knows one.
To which the writer Madeleine L'Engle adds:
 "if I have faith it is because I have met faith; I have seen it in action."

That's our job, to be faith in action,
 to bear one another's burdens
 so that others may meet Jesus and greet the Kingdom.
And though the laborers are few, the harvest is plentiful.

It is a jungle out there,
 but still we go forth -
 to bear one another's burdens
 in the name of Christ. Amen.

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