

Ann Bonner-Stewart  
St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Newton, MA  
Proper 9C, Luke 10:1-11, 16-20  
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My brother-in-law, before he became my brother-in-law,  
was driving from Clemson, SC to Charleston, SC very late one night,  
so late it might have even been early morning.  
Suddenly, he notices a driver waving him down.  
He tries to ignore him, which is what I would do,  
but the man is absolutely insistent he pull over.

He did pull over,  
and a couple of minutes after he and his Australian Shepherd got out of the car,  
the car basically exploded— I'm not exaggerating.  
There was an engine recall he didn't know about.

My family doesn't think about this story, ever, really—  
in fact, my sister in law, his wife, had forgotten about it the first time  
I asked permission to talk about it in a sermon.  
The car exploding ended in needing to replace a car  
The car exploding did not end in a funeral or hospital stay.  
We tend to downplay how scary it was  
because the end was inconvenient,  
Not tragic.  
My brother-in-law even managed to  
retrieve his laptop's files  
for goodness sake.

Hindsight isn't always 20-20.  
Sometimes hindsight is as nearsighted as I am.

Today's appointed Gospel is particularly good—or bad—

At wearing rose-colored glasses, too.

Jesus sends seventy people out

in the middle of his active earthly ministry.

These people are to not to take a bag with them,

meaning they have the clothes on their back,

The shoes on their feet.

They are to eat whatever they're given.

Before they leave, Jesus flat out tells them

not everyone is going to like them.

These instructions – no bag, one set of clothes, no food,

puts these 70 folks in a very vulnerable situation;

They will be at the mercy of strangers.

Now when this story was initially written down,

the 70 had already come back “with joy,” as the text says.

Now what I wish--what would be really helpful to us as people of faith now

is if we could have seen the look

on the all of the seventy's faces

when they were given all the restrictions

that went along with the task.

The 70s' responses are not recorded in the text.

Did they say something that seemed meaningless, even inappropriate,

after the fact since the mission went well?

Were they struck speechless, not knowing what to say?

I don't know how shock was expressed

in that day and age, time and place.

But I imagine blood draining from faces.

I imagine widened eyes.

Jesus admits that he's sending the 70 out  
 like lambs in the midst of wolves, I mean, hello!  
 No wonder there are few laborers!

We have a tendency to downplay—  
 sometimes even forget—  
 initially scary or difficult situations  
 when the outcome is favorable or neutral.  
 On this, the Sunday closest to Independence Day,  
 I'm also reminded of ways in which  
 our nation's founding  
 are often whitewashed.

One of the many gifts of the Broadway musical *Hamilton* is  
 the many, many reminders that the American Revolution's success  
 (well, success from our point of view) was not a given.  
 The colonial army was reduced to eating horses;  
 Army members didn't have adequate clothes,  
 including good shoes, which are incredibly important  
 For anyone doing a lot of walking.  
 As the chorus sings in "Right Hand Man,"  
 they were outgunned, outmanned,  
 outnumbered, outplanned.

Thinking anyone could win against the UK, THE global superpower at the time,  
 was unthinkable, even laughable, so much so that  
 a popular legend developed that British soldiers sang a barsong  
 Called "The World Upside Down" during surrender  
 at Yorktown, which, yes the musical references.

And as we all know winning the revolution was the first step, right.

The rest of the musical reminds us

That in addition to the nation-building, the sacrifice,  
 that which is admirable, basically, there was also  
 backstabbing,  
 infidelity,  
 lying,  
 cheating,  
 power plays,  
 Murder,  
 blackmail.

It's an entire smorgasbord of crap.

We downplay the difficulty of the American revolution

because we know we won.

We downplay the difficulty of the seventy's mission

Because the author of Luke tells us it went well.

So who cares if we only remember the highlight reel?

So what if we downplay scary or difficult situations

if the outcome is something we want?

Who does it really hurt?

Well, it hurts a lot of people, including us.

When we only focus on the good in the past, whether it's recent or not so recent,

When we forget the near-misses like my brother in law's,

when we only see the success of the mission recounted in today's Gospel,

When we gloss over the tenuous of the United States' early years,

we forget how hard it was for the people who lived it.

And we may erroneously start thinking our time  
 is uniquely hard— and we can do nothing.

We might think other generations could do it– but we can't.  
 We might think others generations were lucky—but not us.  
 We could sell ourselves short—  
Or let ourselves off the hook too easily.

To help us,  
 God gifts us as Scripture.  
 The 70 in Luke are not really random people—  
 they are our ancestors in the faith.  
 They are part of our family tree.  
 We can be in awe of the strength and courage  
 it took them to go out and do what they did.  
 We can be proud of it.

And I still often pray that the Spirit will help  
 Us rise up to the challenges of today,  
 which are considerable, as they are in more generations than not.  
 Doesn't have to be gigantic.  
 Does have to be something— a small, good, something.

I am so, so grateful for the folks who came before us,  
 in Scripture, in this country, too.  
 Like them, we too can make a difference,  
 as individuals, and as a community  
 Even if it will take a while to see or believe.  
 Even though we, like they, are imperfect.

In the name of God,  
 who loves us, who redeems us, and who sustains us.  
 Amen.