

***The Gospel of Show and Tell*** (Luke 10:1-11, 16-20)

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The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30; Galatians 6:(1-6), 7-16)

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The signing of the Declaration of Independence began when a patriot gang hungry for freedom signed a declaration for freedom 246 years ago in Philadelphia. This weekend we're celebrating the independence of spirit that brought a group of dissenting colonists together to form a new nation. In signing the Declaration of Independence, they put their names in print for the whole world to know they refused to bow in allegiance to the powerful King of England. Today we joke about putting your John Hancock down on important documents. In 1776, it was risky business and it meant they were willing to die for their cause.

By mid-June in 1776, the Continental Congress named five men to a committee in order to draft a document that would eventually be approved by all the colonies. John Hancock was the first to sign. He's widely known for his signature because, he signed with enough conviction to put his signature in large and unmistakable writing. Have you ever tried to imagine what kind of brazen spirit it must have taken to sign that amazing document? There must have been a strong kindred feeling among the 56 signers that they were doing something amazingly right and that the bond of their commitment would overcome the fear they might die for their cause.

As it turned out, signing the document cost them severely:

- 9 of the signers died of wounds or hardships during the Revolutionary War
- 5 were captured or imprisoned, at times with brutal treatment
- The wives, sons and daughters of others were killed, jailed, mistreated, persecuted or left penniless
- One lost all his 9 children
- The houses of 12 signers were burned to the ground
- 17 lost everything they owned
- Every signer was proscribed as a traitor
- Everyone was hunted
- Most were driven into flight

- Most of them were offered immunity, freedom, property, rewards or the release of loved ones, to recant. No signer defected or changed his stand even in the darkest of hours, although his life and fortune were subject to forfeiture.<sup>1</sup>

In another time of risky challenges, Jesus brought his followers together and teamed them up in dyads and triads and charged them with simple but demanding instructions. And like the mother bird who pushes the baby birds out of the nest to teach them to fly, Jesus sent them out with little more than show and tell instructions: *“Share what you have ... show them my love.”*

In hindsight, Jesus treated them like a bunch of migrant workers: *“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the LORD of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”* At least, it sounds like migrant workers, doesn’t it? They were expected to go where the work was, doing a level of work no one was standing in line to do, with few visible rewards. There were no false illusions that morning as he handed out the assignments he had for them. They kept looking around hoping a truckload of real workers would show up to relieve them (implied: workers more suitable for that kind of lowly service).

They were his disciples, weren’t they? Surely, he didn’t mean for them to work under the kind of instructions he was giving them! But no truckload of helpers showed up. There were no reinforcements on the horizon and they were left to serve in the same way as the Master who wrapped a towel around his waist and simply served.

Jesus made it clear: When you go, when you tell people about the kingdom of God, I don’t want you to take a lot of extra stuff. Just go with what you have. Depend on the hospitality of those who welcome you. And when you go, don’t move from house to house looking for the best place. Stay where you are because I don’t want anybody to get the impression you’re making economic choices in the name of God. Even if it’s a straw mattress, accept it; and whatever they set before you for a meal, eat it. Don’t look down at the table and say, ‘Oh goodness, I can’t eat that.’

Why the instructions about the food, you might ask? Jesus understood that the food placed in front of them would occasionally be kosher Jewish food, and other times it might be Gentile food. He was suggesting, don’t reject one or the other because he didn’t want anyone to think we make any racial, national, or ethnic distinctions before God; not economic, not racial, national, ethnic, not at all. I want you to make it clear that everybody, whether they eat country food or whether they serve an elegant dinner to their finest friends, whether they serve a

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<sup>1</sup> T.R. Fehrenbach, *San Antonio Express-News*, 7/5/98

ritually clean kosher meal, or whether what they serve is food for the Gentiles, before God they are all the same. *"Is that clear?"* he asked them. *"Yes, that's clear,"* they answered. Then, I want you to say to them, *"Now the kingdom of God is here."* That's the good news: God's love and grace is here in the person of Jesus Christ.

God sends us out into the harvest: on the campus, in the apartment buildings, to the workplace, across the street, around the corner, the homes, and the ministry centers, wherever help is needed, wherever Christ is needed. Whatever needs doing, do it.

But there's more going on here than meets the eye. New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan claims in this simple assignment are the roots of the early church. "Sending out this group, by 2's and 3's to operate independently, was an organizational strategy of brilliance. John the Baptist's movement was ended with the single sword stroke that decapitated him. Herod and Caesar had no trouble ending John's power and scattering his followers. But Jesus decentralized his movement, and became unstoppable."

By the time of Jesus' crucifixion, there were hundreds of commissioned ministers scattered all over sharing the good news. The news of Jesus' death would have taken weeks to slowly catch up with them all.

But in the show and tell of God's love, they were already witnessing the blind regaining their sight, and the lame on their feet walking. *"The Spirit is with us,"* they could whisper to one another. *"Christ is alive in us."* From then on, there was no stopping Jesus' movement. Pentecost was gas on the flame that was already flickering, scattering new converts to all the corners of the earth wherever they were given a welcome, a place to sleep, and a meal.

On this Independence Day weekend that's a great place to land. We must be willing like those early patriots who found the inner strength to stand up and say "No" to the tyranny of some who would dictate to you how you are to relate to God. You have been set free by the power of Jesus' life and by the resurrection of Christ from the grave. You are free! Now, in your own independence and among the family of God ... live free and share the good news wherever you go.

You don't have to be persuasive. You're not selling anything. Just be faithful to the story and your experience. It's the goodness of God in human hands, your hands and mine