

## STOMP YOUR FEET

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Summer "We've Got Issues" Theme: Immigration)

Luke 10:1-11

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I.

I am so grateful to our young people who spoke last week about their mission trip to South Dakota, they were so brave to share their truth with us, and big thanks to our outgoing Youth Ministry Coordinator, Emily Syal, for creating this experience for them. If you missed it last week, the youth spoke powerfully about the poverty they witnessed. I think it's fair to say, they *preached*. I don't know about you, but I've been reflecting all week about what it means to feel the pain of seeing children suffer, and not to look away, but to take it in deeply, and then put words around it to share with your community. I've been wondering what it means to be broken open and then to lead from that place of vulnerability. Because that's what our young people did last week. And we are going to carry this theme of vulnerability as one of the key messages from our story today.

This sermon is called "Stomp Your Feet," because that is exactly what Jesus told the 70 to do when they weren't welcomed in a foreign land. As a little act of resistance, let's practice stomping our feet. (stomps) Now, the other word I want us to remember is "peace." And this (peace) is modified sign-language for "peace," try it... Now let's put it together- stomp-and peace- yes, sometimes we gotta let rejection go so we can come back to our center and find peace. So in this sermon I invite you to listen for these themes of resistance and peace.

In the Book of Luke, after Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem, he sends 70 people out to the places he intends to go- in the Book of Genesis, 70 is code for "all of humanity." What Jesus is doing here, is diversifying his movement. He is saying he intends to go to all of humanity, that his message of love and peace is for all people. So he sends these 70 out like laborers pulling in a large harvest, but not just any kind of field workers, they are like lambs among wolves: vulnerable. He instructs them to go empty-handed, and to greet their host families by saying "Peace to this house!" And if they are accepted, then they are to stay and eat with the people, cure the sick, and proclaim the Kin-dom of God. But if they are not welcomed, they are to shake the dust off their shoes and travel on. When they're rejected, they just have to know in their hearts that the Kin-dom of God has come near. That's our story for today; I

wonder what it means to tell this story as we consider the immigration crisis in our country?

## II.

And when I say the words “immigration crisis,” what does that even mean? There’s so much heated rhetoric in our politics right now, our country is so incredibly divided even on what the facts are when we talk about immigrants and their rights. Despite photographs to the contrary, there are people who do not believe that there are overcrowding and human rights violations on our border. Our nation’s ability to find consensus around what makes something “true” has been compromised, and this skewing of reality comes at the harm of poor women, children, and families with brown skin at our southern border. And the issue of immigration is super-broad: from DACA to Border Patrol, from refugees to migrants to undocumented immigrants, from systemic racism to the national-origins quota system; I will not even get to mention all the things there are to talk about immigration in this 15-minute sermon. And I have to admit to feeling quite emotional when I see photos from the border facilities, especially traumatized children, because they are being held as a deterrent, with cruelty as the point of their suffering. In this sermon, I will be operating on the basic premise that immigration in 2019 is about people, it’s about teenagers and mothers and babies. It’s about human beings who are so distressed and who feel so unsafe in their home countries that they risk the journey north. And yes, it’s also about guards and border patrol agents who are enforcing laws; they are people with families and loved ones. Immigration is about people. Jose Antonio Vargas, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who also happens to be an undocumented citizen in the United States, estimates that if 5 people help an undocumented person to “pass,” then illegal immigration would touch 66 million people. Immigration is about people. When the artist who created our bulletin cover was asked about his painting, he said, “We are talking about people, with names, faces, and stories. They have something to teach us ... about who God is, the world we live in and who are our neighbors.” Immigration is about people.

James Dobson, founder of the organization Focus on the Family, recently travelled to the border and wrote about the experience in his July Newsletter that just came out. James Dobson is not an ordained minister, but he and his organization have come to epitomize white, conservative, evangelical Christian thinking, and have supported politicians who advance their ideals. The White House invited him to tour border facilities in McAllen, Texas. Here are his thoughts from his trip:

- He describes horrible and squalid conditions, an overwhelmed border agency, and says the situation at our border is “a human tragedy.”

- He concludes that a border wall is necessary; that many migrants use children to fake being a family so they'll be released sooner; that immigrants bring drugs and gangs into our country; that refugees bring only poverty and disease.
- He says, "Many of them have no marketable skills. They are illiterate and unhealthy. Some are violent criminals. Their numbers will soon overwhelm the culture as we have known it, and it could bankrupt the nation."

So yes, I'm ready to argue against the veracity of his statements, and the merits of his conclusions. But first let's step back and look at the big picture. What does it mean that James Dobson was invited by the White House to go to the border in the first place? Why should he, an extremist leader in the white evangelical movement, be given the access and influence and power to define this issue for Christians? Does it have anything to do with the \$95million Focus on the Family budget, and mobilizing the white evangelical vote? Honestly, I think Emily Syal and her team of youth and leaders would have been a good choice of Christians to witness the camps on our borders and put theological language around it.

But perhaps rather than reading James Dobson's newsletter, I would suggest that we, as striving and aspiring Christians in Sebastopol, might be better off reading the Bible. And when we open the Bible, we find the story of a refugee family with a baby, who seek safety in another land. This baby grows up and crosses literal and cultural borders to build relationships with people who are considered sinners and outcasts. He eats and heals and welcomes the stranger. In our story for today, he tells the 70 to travel ahead of him, knowing they are like lambs among wolves, knowing they are vulnerable, and to begin with a word: Peace.

### III.

When I think about our Bible story for today, I wonder who is being "sent out" to proclaim the Kin-dom of God? Because typically, this story is told from the point of view of the traditional Christian missionary- that Christians are sent out to bring in a harvest of converts. I'm thinking of the fresh-faced young men who have knocked on my door- traveling in pairs to bring me in to their harvest. Part of me wishes I could tell Jesus that historically, this harvest language hasn't turned out so great for indigenous peoples around the world. Or people of color. Or women. Or people who are not straight, cis-gender, males. I live with teenagers, so I'm always embarrassing them by trying to learn their lingo. It's kind of my job as a Mom. One of the words they use is "cringy," which basically means something that makes you cringe. I wish I could tell Jesus that his harvest-language has become kind of cringy. But- What if we try to hear this story from the underside? What if the immigrants and

refugees at our southern border are the ones who are “sent out” to proclaim the Kin-dom? Could it be that we ourselves are meant to be converted by the refugees in cages at our border? And if so, what are we being converted to?

Jesus tells the 70 to go out like lambs among wolves, which sounds scary. So much of the immigration debate in our country is about fear. You can hear how James Dobson preys upon the fear of his audience— fear that poor brown-skinned people will bring drugs and violence, and bankrupt our country—he uses that fear to promote a wall of cruelty and more inhumane border policies that emphasize military response to people’s suffering. But fear is also present in the stories of the immigrants and refugees at the border— many of them are fleeing violence in their home countries. I have to admit that if my children were being threatened by violent gangs, I would make a plan with my spouse to get them out of there and find safety. Fear places people in a vulnerable position. Maybe we are all lambs when we experience fear. Jesus says he’s sending the 70 out like lambs, with no money and no agenda— just vulnerable and open.

And he tells them, he says, the first word you say when you enter a house is “peace.” It’s not a luke-warm kind of a greeting. *Eirene*, the Greek word for peace, literally means “to join or bind together that which has been separated.” It’s not just the absence of conflict, it is ***the intentional healing of brokenness***. The Peace of Christ, in contrast to the Pax Romana, is about turning empire on its head. It’s about binding up the broken. Jesus says that if this healing peace is rejected, it will simply come back to you— just move on. But if your peace is accepted, stay and be nourished, go deep. Recognize safety and embrace it where you find it. So in this American moment, we have a choice— to be a house, a country, that welcomes healing peace, or to be a house that rejects it. Either way, Jesus is clear that the Kin-dom of God is happening whether we accept it or not.

So what is the Kin-dom of God, and what does it mean when it comes near to us? Maybe different people experience it different ways. Perhaps for the caged people in border camps, the Kin-dom of God is the moment when fear crosses over into safety. Because after all the trauma, I would imagine that feeling safe might be a glimpse of the Kin-dom. And maybe for those of us living comfortably in the States, the Kin-dom of God is when we cross over from fear to compassion. Because Lord knows our nation needs more justice, more love, more peace.

#### IV.

There are signs that the Kin-dom of God is near— signs of hope, like the Roman Catholic Bishop of El Paso, Mark Seitz, who has been escorting migrants across the

border bridge in protest of U.S. policy. Signs of hope like Scott Warren, the Arizona man who faces 20-years in jail for the crime of giving water to people crossing the Sonoran desert. Signs of hope like The Rev. Rhina Ramos, who pastors a UCC church in Oakland– she was a child when her family escaped the civil war in El Salvador. She says, "I feel that the UCC is a very important voice right now. ...We love the other, not because someone is a poster child or a model minority. Don't romanticize the immigrant community – just consider an immigrant as another human being." Signs of hope like the members of our church who stood with posters in Railroad Square this week, posters that said, "Children Don't Belong in Cages." I don't have a solution to the immigration crisis that our nation faces. But I do believe that Jesus is calling us to immigrate to a new way of thinking– to be converted to vulnerability, openness, and radical, healing peace. To love our neighbors as ourselves, and to proclaim the Kin-dom of God. Amen.