

Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

By Ken Woodley

With God and with Jesus, it is never too late (and that kind of love never takes a holiday, either, on Memorial Day or any other calendar date).

Never too late for love to triumph over hate.

Never too late for light to rise above darkness.

Never too late for that which is torn to be mended.

Never too late for goodness to make evil cry “Uncle!”

Never too late to find passage through the narrow gate that leads to the wide, open, green pasture that our Good Shepherd has waiting for us.

That is one of several messages in a story made famous in the Gospel of Luke, in which Jesus has appointed seventy of his followers to travel ahead, in pairs, to every town where he intends to go.

And his instructions to those emissaries are quite specific. Carry no purse, he tells them, carry no bag, no sandals.

Furthermore, whenever you enter a town and the townspeople welcome you, Jesus instructs them, cure the sick who are there and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near you.”

But, Jesus adds—after letting them know he is sending them out like lambs into the midst of wolves—whenever you enter a town and its people do not welcome you, go out into the streets and say, “Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you.”

Wow, pretty dramatic stuff right there. Wiping even the dust of such a town off their feet sends quite a message to the townspeople. But a message to his disciples, too, who suffered what would have been an aggressive lack of hospitality.

“Don’t let it get you down, don’t let that experience burden you,” Jesus is telling them without saying it. “Wipe it off your feet.” He knows the physical act of wiping the dust from their feet will make its point in a powerful way to any disciples who find themselves leaving indifference, or outright hostility, behind.

But even such towns and the people who live in them are left with one last perpetual chance. Not simply one last chance. One last *perpetual* chance.

Because that is what God and Jesus offer us—one last perpetual chance, a last chance that is going nowhere. A last chance that will follow us around,

perhaps even tapping us on the shoulder from time to time, as if to say, “Hey, remember me? I’m still here.”

Even after all of that dust-wiping, Jesus informs the seventy disciples, there is one last thing they must do before they leave such towns and their people behind. Words they plant. Words that might still one day grow.

“Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.”

Those are the last words and while they might seem to be part of a final rebuke they can equally, and perhaps even certainly, be regarded as a marker Jesus has his disciples lay down. Because, going back to the beginning of Luke’s lesson, sharing the news that the kingdom of God has come near you is the precise message Jesus told them to share with townspeople in towns that welcomed them.

So the blessing is the same, no matter what.

A perpetual signpost.

The open hand of Jesus left behind, offering the kingdom of God to any who wish to receive it.

A mustard seed that one day might sprout in the hearts and souls of at least some of those townspeople who think, and re-think, about what Jesus’ disciples had meant when they had told them “the Kingdom of God has come near to you.”

That is the message Jesus sent the seventy off to deliver and he has them share it even in the towns that are callously indifferent to them.

Not a final threat, not a final curse, not a final “this is what you missed.”

Instead, it is a final offer of God’s love. Or, “this is what you can still have.”

A final offer that will live forever somewhere in the memory of those who heard it, no matter how the town welcomed, or did not welcome, the disciples.

There each day, there every day, simply waiting for acceptance.

Because, with God and with Jesus, it is never too late.

And when such love is finally accepted, that day becomes one to truly “memorialize.”