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“Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two” (Mark 6:7).

Heb 12:18-19, 21-24; Mark 6:7-13

The word “apostle” means “one sent,” so it follows that the Twelve chosen by Jesus to be his Apostles were sent ahead of him in pairs to evangelize the towns of Galilee he was planning to visit. Jesus’ instructions to them tell us a great deal about how he wanted their appearance and actions to reflect the message they carried. They went in pairs, sharing community. They were to move directly and quickly, traveling light with only what they needed to complete their mission: A walking stick and sandals to be sure nothing impeded their progress, but dependent on their hosts for food and lodging.

Open doors and welcome were important signs of receptivity and trust that would be rewarded with healings and exorcisms. They came in the name of Jesus, possessing his power and authority. If resisted, they were not to argue or try to proselytize the reluctant, but move on, shaking the dust from their feet. The towns that received them would be blessed, and word would get around to stir regret in those towns that did not, judgment enough on them.

The Good News is life-giving and therefore expansive. Not to advance and grow is to retreat and stagnate. Pope Francis became pope with the promise to get the church out of self-referential stagnation. Evangelization means to be sent, to go out, expand to the margins. A defensive church gets sick. A fortress church is moribund and collapsing in on itself. Vatican II was a Spirit-impelled re-engagement with the world of science, culture, art and ideas, a dialogue with other Christian churches and with global religions. Francis' pontificate reconnected the church to the energy and spirit of the Council.

This energy and spirit are the antidote to the crisis in a world divided and retreating from cooperation and community-building. The move toward nationalist and racial enclaves is regressive and threatens the common good, environmental stability and world peace. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and exposed the illusion that any nation can be secure and self-sustaining on the planet by walling itself in or seeking to dominate its neighbors. We will rise or fall together.

Jesus summons us to be apostles. We are, in the words of poet e. e. cummings, "little churches," whether obscure or prominent, sent to evangelize the world by being one, holy, catholic and apostolic in our own ways and situations. Our lives are not solitary or our own, but ministries, liturgies, sacramental signs of the presence and redemptive activity of Jesus. To be alive in Christ is to go out of ourselves, expanding to others, from center to margins, trusting that whatever we need will be given to us as we go.

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