

Peace Lutheran Church, West Seattle July 6, 2025

GOSPEL: LUKE 10:1-11, 16-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' "

¹⁶"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

¹⁷The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" ¹⁸He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Good morning!

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples he's sending them out "like lambs into the midst of wolves." He sends them into unfamiliar lands with nothing but instructions, completely dependent upon the hospitality of strangers. To me, that sounds kinda scary. Would they be safe? Would they be rejected? Or would they be welcomed? And treated like guests.

This idea — of being welcomed or rejected in foreign lands — reminded me of when Marcia Olson told the Creation Care Team that the Westside Interfaith Network, of which Peace is part, was training Welcome Table volunteers on what to do if ICE showed up. Think about that. Volunteers of faith from all kinds of congregations throughout Seattle's west side work hard through the Welcome Table to help immigrants. How devastating that seeking that help might

now land those immigrants in an ICE detention center facing deportation — maybe even to a place thousands of miles from their country of origin.

I think about those immigrants. They had to be very afraid to come to *this* foreign land, reliant on the hospitality of strangers, hopeful *someone* would at least give them a chance. No one *sent* them here with next to nothing, but *circumstances* did: the inability to provide for their family, fear they weren't safe at home, the realization they couldn't survive where they were, concern that their children had an uncertain, and maybe dangerous, future if they stayed.

And *that* had me thinking about Gaia Vince's book — *Nomad Century: How Climate Migration Will Reshape Our World*. Her premise is simply this: Humanity worldwide came to live where we live—because *we migrated!* And migration is how we'll survive a warming world.

This is the gist of what I want to talk about today. Jesus gives us a model of how we're to treat the stranger, to provide hospitality, and not only in the book of Luke. That model bears little resemblance to how strangers from other lands often are treated in our world, and in our country, today. The climate crisis is going to make more migration *inevitable*. And that migration, Vince writes, “will remake the world in this century whether by accident or design. Better by design.” She continues:

“Climate change is *everything* change, because climate is the fabric on which we weave our lives. It determines where human habitation is viable and how we live there, the timing of seasons and what can be grown, where the rain falls, how hot it is, the shape of coastlines and storms. Every one of us will experience this profound existential change over the coming decades — a dislocation in our relationship with the environment that generated our culture, our society, our own lives.”

In fact, we're *already* experiencing this change. To illustrate, Vince references the 2021 heat wave that *literally* cooked the Pacific Northwest. You remember. One billion seashore creatures baked in their shells as the worst heat coincided with low tide. Fruit cooked on the trees, crops and buildings burned; hundreds of people died.

It won't be the last time we face greater extremes here; but we're luckier than most in that our local climate is expected to remain much more livable than those in many other locations. Still, coastal tribes are working to move their communities away from the Pacific Coast; and South

Park residents are talking with the City about how to prepare for more frequent high tide flooding from the Duwamish River, and whether or not they can even stay there.

While we aren't necessarily seeing it yet in our own backyard, climate migration *is* already happening. The UN estimates that today more people are displaced by climate change every year than by war. The UN Refugee Agency reported that in 2022, a record of more than 32 million people were displaced due to weather-related events. That's the equivalent of having nearly 10% of Americans suddenly displaced! Can you imagine that?

These people are, in reality, climate refugees, although that's not a term officially recognized in international law. In fact, displacement solely in the context of climate change or weather disasters is not covered by the 1951 UN Convention. Without legal designation as refugees, these climate migrants could easily be sent back home, *or* forced into refugee camps.

That is unless an individual's risk of facing persecution or violence is increased by climate change, as was the case in northern Cameroon in 2021, that year we cooked? Hundreds of people were killed and tens of thousands fled to neighboring Chad following violence between herders and fishermen that was sparked by dwindling water resources linked to climate change. *Violence between herders and fishermen!*

Climate change already is making parts of our world unlivable. Take, as an example, the tiny Polynesian island nation of Tuvalu (too-VAH-loo), which is losing land to rising seas. Australia offered its 10,000 citizens "climate visas." Within a week, *half* of them had applied. The number of people displaced by weather-related hazards in 2022 was 41% higher than 2008 levels. That's a nasty 14-year trend line. And it's going to get worse.

Besides making extreme weather more frequent and more extreme, climate change is what's called a "threat multiplier" — it magnifies the impact of other factors that can contribute to displacement such as poverty, loss of livelihoods, and tensions relating to dwindling resources, ultimately creating conditions that can lead to conflict and flight.

In Burkina Faso, for example, some of the worst violence and displacement in recent years has taken place in the poorest, most drought-affected areas where armed groups have exploited tensions over shrinking sources of water and arable land. At the same time, the presence of violence and conflict can severely undermine the capacity of governments to respond to the effects of climate change. That applies equally to international relief organizations like the

ELCA's Lutheran Disaster Response. Climate change is a humanitarian crisis unfolding before our very eyes.

I know that all sounds bleak. Are we stuck with that future? We don't have to be.

We can stop fueling global warming, pumping more and more planet heating gases into our atmosphere. We can work to restore the natural systems that regulate our climate. And we can resist despair, that feeling that it's too late, that nothing can be done. Because, as climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe writes, "giving in to that despair *guarantees* we'll face the most catastrophic climate impacts by paralyzing our ability to prepare for what is already inevitable and preventing even more devastating warming."

Even the UN fears we'll give in to hopelessness! Listen to this statement from its website:

"... it is *not* too late to act, either to cut emissions to minimize further global heating, or to invest in adaptation that increases the resilience of vulnerable populations and reduces the risk that people will be displaced or otherwise adversely affected." It continues: "We can help people better prepare for extreme weather and adapt to the changing climate. We can also tackle some of the other root causes of displacement that are amplified by climate change such as poverty, inequality and violence."

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we can change how we *look* at migration. Today, about one-third of humanity is on the move, mostly as internal migrants shifting from rural landscapes to cities. But still. One third! It's a flash point in America and elsewhere these days, but migration is actually a *good* thing — after all, it's how most all of us came to be here today.

Again I quote Gaia Vince:

"The economic benefits of immigration are significant, immediate and remarkably long lasting. One study found that US counties that received larger numbers of immigrants between 1860 and 1920 had a 57% average increase by 1930 in manufacturing output per capita and up to 58% increase in agricultural farm values; and also, 20% higher average incomes and education attainment, and lower unemployment and poverty rates in (the year) 2000." Long-lasting indeed!

Vince notes that numerous studies have looked at the effect of immigration, and evidence shows that even large waves of low-skilled migrants arriving have no negative impact on the wages or employment prospects of the folks already there. In fact, they often have a *positive* impact.

So given that, and the fact that we can't stop desperate people from trying to cross our borders, even with walls and guns, we have to choose. Will we, as a people, help and embrace the responsibilities of hosts? Or will we stand by and watch as people who need our help suffer, or even die?

We need to go back to Christ's model for welcoming strangers and helping one another. In today's Gospel, Luke quotes Jesus saying "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

When we turn away people in need, aren't we rejecting the one who taught us to love our neighbors?

Opportunities lie hidden in every challenge, and the climate crisis hold plenty of them. Vince wrote that it would be better if migration remade the world in this century *by design* rather than by accident. The same holds true for mitigating and adapting to global warming. Lurching from one crisis after another will be costly in so many ways: the loss of life, both human and animal, of habitat, of infrastructure, of arable land and potable water. But if we, the global community, could recognize the urgency of our situation and the *opportunity* we have to redesign the human world with purpose, we could create something new and better, in a way that cares for those who face the greatest potential harm and prepares us for what's ahead.

Yes, that's a big challenge. To meet it, perhaps what we *really* need is to have the way we *think* about this whole situation migrate!

Did you know Canada has a successful community sponsorship model, in which private or community organizations cover the financial costs and settlement support for humanitarian migrants? Canada has welcomed more than 300,000 refugees just through this one program.

It's a small example. But there are many models and creative ideas for how we can adapt to a world notably warmer than it's been at *any point in human history*. Here in the U.S., our infrastructure, utility grids and water supply systems weren't designed for high heat or more intense storms. Modern agricultural, developed over these past thousands of years, depends upon a stable, pretty friendly, climate. Our modern lives aren't designed for the world we're creating. As Vince wrote, climate change is *everything* change. So we need to redesign how we do most everything. There's so much to do! So many opportunities to remake our world and create a sustainable future for all of Creation.

So how will *we* respond in this nomad century? We have instructions right here in Luke. Aren't we called to form community with immigrants and others who live with injustice and whose lives touch our own? Aren't *we* the hosts Jesus expects to share the burdens being carried by others? Will we wash, feed and shelter those coming to us in need? Will we be the messengers sent out to help these refugees find it?

Or will those coming to us in dire straits have to, as Luke writes, wipe from their sandals the dust of our town in protest against us? The choice is ours. Let us all consider our options well.

Amen.