

Two cities

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Gordon Lathrop evokes Gerard Manley Hopkins when he [speaks of](#) the “gear, tackle and trim of pastoral ministry.” Luke’s account of the sending of the 70 describes just that: our gear. Lathrop’s work explores how this gear is sufficient for the present and future work of ministry.

The concept of *cities* is interesting in this passage. There are two types of cities. There are the towns that welcome the sent ones, take them in, feed them, accept the healing and welcome messages about the nearness of the kingdom of God. Then there are towns that do not return the greeting of peace. Instead they reject the journeyers, who in turn are to shake the dust of those places off of their feet.

This is a tale of two cities. The sent ones go and greet the inhabitants of these towns, and the reaction of the people determines their relationship to God. The 70 have a hand in people’s acceptance or rejection of gospel news.

But the Old Testament reading sets another image of city alongside these two. Isaiah’s account is about Jerusalem: the city is like a mother who offers her breast and nurses her children. The youth are carried on her arm and dandled on her knee. In the face of exile and deportation and international unknowing there is this image of the city of Jerusalem and the destiny of all nations: God will bless. God will feed. God’s promises will come to pass.

Here the city does not need our visitation or announcement of gospel news. It is itself the gospel news, and this city of God awaits our visitation in order to welcome and succor us.

Yet the passage shares this with the gospel reading: the power is put in our hands but is not our power. Sent to cities that welcome or revoke our presence, we might be tempted to take ownership of them. The Isaiah passage is a counterbalance: Jerusalem is not ours to evangelize or depart (shaking dust off our feet). This city

waits on us.

On July 4, Isaiah's city offers a caution to nation-state fervor: we don't fashion the city of God. We don't create the city on the hill; it is of God. It will welcome the nations. It succors us: we are but infants, children on its knees. God has made it so.

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