Jesus said to the 70 apostles, “Go! Be warned, though, That I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves.”
In the name of God, Creator, Savior, and Sustainer. Amen.
On the bronze plaque at the base of The Statue of Liberty, Is the poem *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus.
It is a sonnet to America as the Mother of Exiles, part of it goes:
    “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.”
It’s a strong part of our American heritage.
And one that interweaves nicely with our Gospel lesson today.
So, on this July 4th weekend, let’s start with our American heritage.

Unless, any of you are full blooded Native Americans, Part of the original settlement of the Americas 15,000 yrs ago, Then you are part of the immigrations that began 400 yrs ago. A mixture of European, African, Asian, and Latina newcomers. Until 1875 our borders were open. Anyone could come in. In that year, Congress passed the first law restricting immigration. And it forbade entry to convicts, prostitutes and Chinese laborers. But none of us came over because we were rich and happy. We are all the wretched refuse of teeming shores. We came here as indentured servants, slaves and prisoners. We came fleeing religious, political, or economic oppression. We came as refugees of violence, war, famine or pestilence. We left countries because we were inconvenient. We are descendants of vagrants, idlers, and rebels. We are the progeny of wretched refuse indeed.

I certainly am. I am the proud descendant of White Trash. Which is the only ethnic epithet we still utter in polite company. With all of its well known subtypes: Crackers, rednecks, hillbillies, clay eaters and hoe wielders. I myself am a cracker from the bayous of the Gulf Coast. In 1650, my Bells were Scot Catholics fleeing religious oppression. Cromwell’s Puritan army drove us out of Scotland. So we went to Ireland, and made a living brewing beer. But in 1814, during the first potato famine, the Bells were starving. Three Bell brothers gave up and sold their brewery—this is a true, but sad story—To a family named Guinness.
They used the proceeds to immigrate to America.  
My best guess is that the Bell brothers got on the wrong boat.  
Because they landed in Miami: too hot, too flat and too hostile.  
Truly lambs among wolves. They took the next boat out and headed to Pensacola.  
A malarial, poverty-stricken backwater governed by Andrew Jackson.  
When they landed, they were the lowest of White Trash.  

Poor Irish Catholics in an English Protestant country.  
My ancestors fled religious oppression and famine.  
They knew poverty, pestilence and bigotry.  
So they felt right at home in this New World.  
We trace our roots quite easily through public drunkenness arrests,  
Bankruptcy, debtor’s prisons, and other memorials of honor.  
My grandfather Langley was the 8th of 13 children—we are very Catholic family.  
Langley had no formal education past the 8th grade.  
After service in WWI, he began working in a law firm.  
Read the books in its library at night, and passed the Bar Exam.  
Langley became Tax Collector—but a beloved Tax Collector.  
And then Clerk of the County Court. He bought some land during the Depression,  
And put it in trust for the education of his 11 grandchildren.  
And we all became service professionals:  
Doctors, lawyers, nurses, social workers, bankers and teachers.  
It’s the Horatio Alger myth in miniature.  

But I claim my heritage as White Trash—as a Cracker from the bayou.  
Wretched refuse from the teeming shores of Europe.  
So, in 2009, when I moved to Baltimore—I naturally settled in Canton.  
My condo is in a converted factory on the old Cannery Row.  
Flanked by row houses that once held poor whites—  
Of Irish, Polish, Italian, Ukrainian immigrations. A true White Trash mecca.  
In 2011, when I fell in love,  
I was naturally drawn to Jo Marie, a hillbilly from East Tennessee.  
When I see our housekeeper who fled the gangs in Honduras.  
Or the super in our building, part of the Black Diaspora,  
Brought here as a slave, then a refugee from Jim Crow and the KKK.  
Or the Mexicans who do the landscaping.  
Or when I see Syrians fleeing religious oppression, violence,  
Drought, war, and more, I don’t see strangers.  
I see the American story writ large. I see kith and kin—friends and family.  
Lambs striving to thrive among wolves.
But enough of our glorious American heritage. Let’s look at our religious heritage. 
As Christians, our story goes back to Abraham—
A dark-skinned stranger wandering in a strange land.
And to Moses, a murderer fleeing the law.
Who returned to Africa to free his people from slavery. Who received God’s covenant.
The covenant that requires us to care for the immigrant, the poor,
Because we were all strangers wandering in a strange land.
Enslaved by Pharaohs in Egypt and Kings in Babylon,
And freed by God, who cares for us as mother comforts her child.
And the new dispensation brought us by Jesus?
The new covenant doubles down on this heritage.
Jesus came to bring good news to the oppressed. To bind up the broken-hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners.  

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus sends out 70 apostles.
Jesus is a kind of Olive Trash. A Galilean peasant in a backwater of Roman Oppression.
From a people who faced the specter of starvation every year.
Who knew economic and religious oppression.
Who suffered every manner of war and violence.
Jesus, who has turned his own face toward Jerusalem,
And walks toward imprisonment, betrayal, torture and a traitor’s death.
But on this day, Jesus sends out the 70 and warns them,
“Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves.”
They go into Samaria, a hostile land that regards Jews as apostates.
They don’t go as glorious heroes but as poor aliens.
They go in pairs, with no wallet or bag or even shoes.
They go as unwashed, poor strangers in a strange land.
They go as wretched refuse to prepare the way for Jesus.
To enter a village and knock on a door and offer God’s peace.
And, if the household returns that peace,
Then they are to stay, to heal the sick and proclaim the good news.
The good news that the Kingdom of God has come.

Understand this: The healing is not different from proclaiming the kingdom.
These are not Galilean physicians making house calls.
They are peasants working the harvest for the Lord.
They go in the name of the Lord to renew and restore.
To prepare the way for the coming Kingdom of God.
The Kingdom that the coming of Jesus ushers in to the world.
The beginning of new creation.
What irony! That the glorious Kingdom is so humble and poor.
Jesus sends them out, not as conquering soldiers, but as lambs among wolves. Picture that—an encircling pack of ravenous wolves, salivating, lunging, fangs bared, fast and coordinated viciousness. And two lambs, gentle, slow and bleating weakness. Jesus, the Lamb of God, sends out lambs into the world, as harbingers of the coming Kingdom. And through these lambs going forth, Satan falls from the sky like lightning.

So when you leave Church today, go forth as gentle lambs among ravenous wolves. Be innocent and humble. When you think of your American heritage this 4th of July, look beyond the founding fathers, the generals, the conquests, and remember your arrival on these shores as wretched refuse. That all of us are immigrants, strangers in a strange land. Claim your European or Asian or African or Latina heritage. Shoot! Claim your White Trash heritage if you can. And claim your heritage as a follower of a poor Galilean peasant. Olive Trash who is also the Lamb of God. The King of Peace who is beyond our understanding, but not beyond our loving. Love God. Love Jesus. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. And when you hear of wars or plagues or oppression. Do not be afraid. But claim your lambship! And look out with the eyes of compassion. Look for the refugee, the immigrant, the stranger, the alien. And see that they are your kith and your kin. They are beloved children of God just as you are. They are your family and your friends, your neighbors who are fully worthy of your love and attention. Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves. Amen.

Bibliography


Luke 10:1-11, 16-20  (CEB)  Seventy-two sent out

10 After these things, the Lord commissioned seventy-two others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every city and place he was about to go. 2He said to them, “The harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest. 3Go! Be warned, though, that I’m sending you out as lambs among wolves. 4Carry no wallet, no bag, and no sandals. Don’t even greet anyone along the way. 5Whenever you enter a house, first say, ‘May peace be on this house.’ 6If anyone there shares God’s peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. 7Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you, for workers deserve their pay. Don’t move from house to house. 8Whenever you enter a city and its people welcome you, eat what they set before you. 9Heal the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘God’s kingdom has come upon you.’ 10Whenever you enter a city and the people don’t welcome you, go out into the streets and say, 11 ‘As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet. But know this: God’s kingdom has come to you.’

16Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. Whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

17The seventy-two returned joyously, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit themselves to us in your name.”

18Jesus replied, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19Look, I have given you authority to crush snakes and scorpions underfoot. I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you. 20Nevertheless, don’t rejoice because the spirits submit to you. Rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.”

Collect O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.