

I love maps. When I was growing up, my parents bought me a secondhand National Geographic atlas. It was falling apart even then; some of the pages had come loose from the spine. It was as old as I was, still showing the Soviet Union, a divided Germany, and western names for Eastern cities. But I cherish that crumbling, outdated, politically-incorrect atlas and I still keep it on my coffee table. And when I moved into my first church office, I proudly stuck my map of Jerusalem on the wall, a tangible reminder of my pilgrimages there and a key to understanding the events of Holy Week.

Most people use maps as a means to an end, like a reference book, to answer a simple question, and then perhaps only grudgingly. Perhaps you've been on road trips where the driver has refused to use a map, with predictable results.

But I can lose myself in a map, enthralled by the endless possibilities of culture and geography, people and relationships that are out there, waiting to be encountered. I can even re-fold them correctly, often on the first try. Every map implicitly promises that the world is knowable and finite, that we can be confident in finding the relationships between places, which engender the relationships between people, for geography is destiny.

Who among us would turn down the chance to peek at a map of our own lives, to know what was in store for us? But of course God doesn't permit us such knowledge. From what I can tell, God wants us to discover creation not through an abstraction composed by others, but by our own direct experience. God wants us to put ourselves on the line, to encounter surprises and mysteries firsthand and apply the gifts God has given us in real time, in real places.

When Jesus sent the 70 out into the world, he did not provide them with maps. He gave them something even better: his spirit, his blessing, his peace, and his power over physical and spiritual illness. The number of people he sent indicates the scope of their mission: in ancient Jewish thought, the number 70 symbolized the number of nations in the world. They might not have known exactly where they were going, and they certainly didn't know what was going to happen, but they knew the most important thing. They knew their mission: to proclaim God's love, power, and presence. Even if you have the best maps, if you don't know your purpose, you're lost before you even set out. So Jesus commissioned them to make this proclamation in word and in deed, both telling and showing the world that God's kingdom was near.

Can you imagine the excitement, the trepidation, that they must have felt to look their Lord in the eye and hear that he had chosen them to go into unknown places with a new message? And they went out with a sense of intense urgency, disregarding the cultural expectation of greeting fellow travelers, and setting aside their own dietary laws for the sake of the mission. Can you imagine the joy they felt in returning to Jesus in triumph, looking into his eyes again, renewed with wonderful encounters and triumphs, remade by an experience they could never have dreamt of before they went out in Christ's name?

While this story comes off as a self-contained unit, it tells us explicitly that the journeys of the 70 were only a preliminary exercise, as extraordinary as they were. For Jesus only sent them into the world because he himself planned to do the same. They were going ahead of him, merely laying the groundwork, making a way in the wilderness for Jesus.

While Jesus did get around during his public ministry, he hardly went into all the world. The ground he covered was part of a small province within an empire that, despite its size, covered only a small fraction of the world's land area. In strictly geographical terms, he didn't get far. Even the 70, who Jesus ordered to go out under-equipped, couldn't have covered much ground. So was the mission of the 70, the mission to reach all the nations of the world, a joke, or a stunt? Only in a literal, geographical sense. Today's readings show the stark contrast between cartography and theology.

Paul wrote to the Christians of Galatia, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." In one sentence, he articulates a complex and cosmic theology of redemption and renewal. Paul understood that the death and resurrection of Jesus were intended to bring new life not just to Jesus, and not just to Christians, and not just to all people, but to *all the universe*. As important as having a personal relationship with Jesus is, such a relationship exists in the context of a community and a world that Jesus has sanctified. In other words, personal does not mean isolated, unconnected. There are no islands on God's map of humanity.

God intended for all of Creation to be mutually supportive, to work together for God's glory. God created us to live in peaceful unity with each other and with the rest of Creation. Humanity's failings were not contained to ourselves, but also tainted the universe. Therefore, God had to make all creation new.

God could have just wiped everything out and started over, and perhaps made a new universe with less freedom to choose against God's will. But God loves us, and all creation, despite our many flaws. So God chose a way that increases God's glory, that increases our freedom, and mends creation with new life. God sowed the seed of redemption, the body of Christ, within a chamber of the earth, and that seed arose bearing the good fruit of forgiveness and new life.

Our mission in Christ continues so long as humanity fails to live up to the ideals God intends for us, as expressed in Scripture and the ongoing life of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and expressed best of all in Jesus himself. But of course, Jesus chose not to do everything himself, but rather to invite his followers into a partnership with him, a tangible expression of his humility and his respect for our autonomy and desire for us to grow in him, both of which are facets of his love for us.

God knows the world needs to understand that Christians are motivated by love, and determined to include others in love. I urge you to accept Jesus's invitation, to use

the gifts God has given you to share God's love with the world both in word and in deed, because our affirmative response glorifies Jesus and brings us to share in his glory as another form of his incarnation. And unlike the 70, we go out well-equipped.

God gave us the sacraments to keep us connected to that new life in Christ. The sacrament of Holy Baptism brings individual lives into communion with Christ and the community that has chosen to embrace the gift of new life, the Church. And we renew that life and those connections in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Like the 70, all the baptized share in the mission of Christ, the sharing of new life with the world in Christ's name. The sacraments add us to the community of missionaries and apostles who proclaim by word and example that all the world is worthy of God's love, and God's love is powerful and proactive.

Unlike the world, God's love is infinite, and therefore beyond full human comprehension. Even though we don't get handed a map with our mission, we do have the witness of the faithful and the abiding wisdom of the Holy Spirit. They are more than enough, for they show us that God's way, the way of the Cross, is none other than the way of life and peace, and no other mission leads to greater joy.