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“Shake the dust from your feet” (Matt 10:14).

Hosea 11:1-4, 8-9; Matt 10:7-15

We are right to always look for Good News in the Scripture readings. Hosea contains some of the most moving expressions of God’s love for his people even in their sinfulness; “It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks (11:4).

The only explanation for the Incarnation is God’s compelling mercy toward Creation and the People he chose to be his own. God became human like us to pursue us and bring us back when we were like lost sheep. Jesus sends his Apostles ahead of him to extend God’s invitation to turn to divine mercy. He empowers them to demonstrate this mercy in a wave of healings and exorcisms, even by raising the dead.

Yet, today’s Gospel also contains a warning. The Apostles are not to waste time where they are not welcome. Their gift of peace will return to them if it is not reciprocated. In the harshest terms imaginable, Jesus compares those towns that turn his messengers away to Sodom and Gomorrah. “Shake the dust from your feet” as you depart.

Even with God’s overwhelming love, human freedom gets to decide. What value is our yes if we cannot say no? Jesus will later look over Jerusalem and weep because the City of David did not know the hour of God’s visitation. Lost opportunity will be the consequence. There is no need for punishment. Virtue is its own reward and

neglect is its own loss. We simply reap what we sow. Our religious faith does not excuse or rescue us from reality. The Gospel comes in on top of the basic laws of life and rules of social responsibility.

The Good News is that we can still control the outcome of much of our personal reality. We are not victims of blind fate or divine judgment. God is always love, always forgiveness, always ready to show us how to deal with life's challenges and setbacks, how to be smart and proactive. Even when we make mistakes or act unwisely, if we want help God offers creative ways to correct things, begin again.

Christian discipleship was first called simply "The Way." It was both a body of teaching, but always in the context of community, networks of relationships, common projects to make life more peaceful and just. It attracted others who saw the benefits of charity and mutual support. It was in this context that believers experienced the lively presence of Jesus, whose death and resurrection offered a pattern of surrender and joy in daily life. We are invited to freely embrace it as a way of life and a continual encounter with the mystery of God. This is the Good News.

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