

Sunday 6th July 2019 St. Luke's Ordinary 14

Readings: Ps.66:1-9; Gal.6:(1-6), 7-16; Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

Reflection

“*Did I get you out of bed?*” Jim’s cheery voice teased on the phone just three Saturday’s ago. On that early Saturday morning, he was surprised to hear that I’d just arrived at Mayfield church, North Canterbury to lead a retreat day. We had a good conversation – an update on Jim’s state of health, his funeral plans and of course, a few ‘Jim’ jokes thrown in. There was some reminiscing too, amusing anecdotes, significant ministries. I treasure that conversation and deeply honour Jim’s life and faithful ministry. It was good to be able to tell him so.

Our beloved brother Jim was *called* by God. He responded willingly, cheerfully and courageously to that call. Like each of us, through baptism, Jim was called to be a disciple *and* an apostle – to be both a follower of Jesus - and to be sent out, to live out God’s *mission* in the world. He did so in his own unique way, responding to God’s unique call on his life (and we will hear and share plenty about that as we commend him to God’s eternal care next week). Jim has now been called home and he leaves a very big ‘Jim-shaped’ gap in our hearts, our faith community and lives. (We hold Trish and all Jim’s family in our prayers).

God calls each of *us* to mission – to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. So what does it *take*, to be an apostle for Christ? In today’s gospel, Jesus sends out an appointed seventy in pairs, ‘to every town and place where he himself intended to go.’ *I* wonder *who these* appointed ones were? How and why, did Jesus choose them? What skills and talents did *they* have, that made them willing and able for such a task?

In the previous chapter of Luke, we read that a Samaritan village refuses to receive *Jesus*. So we could be tempted to ask: “If the Samaritans would not listen to Jesus himself, how on earth are ordinary disciples going to succeed?” And yet, today’s account tells of the apostles’ joyful return with stories of the power of God, transforming lives: “*Lord, in your*

name, even the demons submit to us!” They must have been buzzing! On a Spirit-filled high, bursting with the stories of their successes! What a mission! Being sent ahead – by Jesus, like lambs into the midst of wolves – vulnerable, utterly unencumbered, completely focused on their task, travelling light, carrying nothing but ‘the peace that passes all understanding’ with which to offer to those who would receive it. Luke gives little attention to the actual mission of the disciples, but rather concentrates his reflections on the *nature* of mission and the causes of its joys and sorrows.

What does it mean for us, to offer Christ’s peace to others? Do we need to be at peace with ourselves and with one another before we can truly offer Christ’s peace?

Do we need to stand firm, trusting in God, ready for the times when that divine peace is *not* received by others? When we find ourselves unwelcome, ignored or scorned. Or do we close our hearts and minds in the face of rejection or conflict? Living out God’s mission of unconditional love requires a certain resilience and courage.

Are *we* willing to travel light? Can we let go of all that might encumber us, the baggage we regularly carry? I ask myself, what do *I* need to try and set down or leave behind before I walk out the door in the morning – judgemental attitudes, self-interest, greed, impatience, stubbornness? Perhaps you can identify *one* thing you’d like to leave behind or set aside in order to ‘travel lighter’?

I’m relieved that Jesus doesn’t call us to be loners in mission. He sent the seventy out in pairs. No sense of isolation, but *mutual support*, communal commitment.

Are we willing to *go* where we are sent, open to God’s call?

And what of hospitality? The commissioned seventy were instructed to stay where they were welcomed and to *receive* hospitality. Is it easier for *us* to give rather than to receive? We need to be able to do both – give generously and receive graciously.

So what does it take, to be an apostle for Christ? Peace of heart, gentleness, humility, trust? God’s kingdom does not come by force, but by peace. God’s kingdom does not come by arrogance, but by humility; not by aggression, but by gentleness, not by fear nor suspicion, but by trust.

At last weekend's Peace Conference, we screened the 2017 humanitarian award winning documentary *Haka and Guitars* (now retold in this year's film production: *Soldiers without Guns*). It tells the story of how - in 1997, after 14 failed peace agreements during the 10-year Bougainville Civil War - the New Zealand army stepped in with a radical and courageous new plan. Instead of bringing guns, the unarmed soldiers – men and women - took guitars, Māori culture and aroha. Condemned by the media, the peacekeeping mission helped to end the worst civil war in the Pacific's history, achieving peace without guns and violence.

God's kingdom comes, through us! What an attitude of trust *Jesus* had, appointing and sending forth the seventy ahead of him, to preach and heal. He makes no secret of the difficulties they will face. They will be like sheep among wolves and they must expect a degree of rejection and failure.

But the amazing reality is, that God repeatedly chooses to work through ordinary people like us, “warts and all” people, to accomplish the mission to which God calls us. Jesus reminds us - “*whoever listens to you, listens to me.*”

As the baptized people of God, *we* are called to be both disciples and apostles – both followers of Jesus, AND the hands and feet of Christ, sent out to be Christ's work in the world, equipped simply with our unique selves, and with our God-given gifts. Sent out to live and proclaim the gospel of peace – sent out to both discover and create glimpses of the kingdom.

The kingdom of God comes near when compassion is expressed toward those to whom we are sent; and when we are able to humbly receive the gift of hospitality, there are opportunities to share the good news of God's peace.

May we go forth from here (just as our beloved brother Jim did) as both disciples and apostles, in the knowledge and peace of God's love and purpose for us all.

In the name of God..... Amen.