

Proper 9 - 6 Pentecost – Year C – July 7, 2010 - Homily
2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30; Galatians 6:1-16; Luke 10:1-20
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George Owen once wrote that, “The world has many religions; it has but one Gospel.” According to our Gospel reading this week from Luke, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” Jesus sends out seventy or by some accounts seventy-two disciples to go ahead of him to the towns and villages He intends to stop at on His own road to Jerusalem. Jesus’ instructions are very clear. Basically the disciples are to travel light, to accept hospitality where and when it is offered, and to move on where and when they are not welcomed. According to the last part of tonight’s reading from Luke it clear that the important part of the mission is simply that the disciples are willing to go and share the Good News of Jesus, expanding God’s kingdom. In that respect, they are making an eternal difference in the lives of those who hear, receive and act on the Good News. There are also some interesting points around the spiritual and eternal versus the worldly and temporal aspects of Jesus’ mission, and that of all His disciples, both then and now.

If I ask the obvious question, “Who here considers themselves a missionary?” I wonder how many of us would raise our hands. “Who here considers themselves a missionary?” The curious thing is that we often consider missionaries to be those who go off to far-flung regions of the world to share the Gospel with those who may or may not have heard about Jesus before. I’m willing to bet that few of us consider our own lives to be primarily mission-focused or consider ourselves to be missionaries. Yet that is precisely who we are and what God has called us all to be by virtue of our Baptism. Here’s an example. I’m a missionary every time I go to Wal-Mart or travel anywhere wearing my clerical collar. I don’t even need to speak to anyone to express my highly recognizable commitment to Jesus Christ, because most people recognize that a clerical collar means I must be a priest. You might say I have it easy! Another slice of that truth pie is that you are all missionaries. The good news is that you don’t have to pack your bags, learn a foreign language, or live in a strange country to share the Gospel message. One of my favorite quotes credited to St. Francis of Assisi goes like this, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.” You’ve heard me say it before, but our faith flows through our words and deeds, it is integral to who we are in the world, and in community. God’s grace in action also flows from the decisions we make moment-by-moment compelling us to look graciously upon those in need, to offer help to others with a spirit of compassion, and to respect all those we meet along the way.

If we take a closer look at the reading from Luke, we see some very specific instructions to the disciples, which are just as valid today as they were then – even though our own context is a vastly different. The first is that Jesus sent the disciples off in pairs. That is why we are part of a wonderful faith community like the Church of Our Saviour – we need one another for encouragement, or maybe just courage, and before we go out into the world we gather together to be strengthened by the Body and Blood of Christ. The next thing that Jesus says is, “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.” How do we ask God anything? By praying, of course! More excellent and highly relevant advice! Traveling light is the next piece of instruction. One aspect of traveling light is making ourselves vulnerable because we will need to accept help and hospitality if we are truly just taking with us the bare minimum. More on that in a minute. The other aspect is about material possessions period. This is one reason why I love that we have a rummage sale every year, so we can pass along all that stuff that we really don’t need to do the work God has given us to do. It has been said that beyond a certain level of comfort, money and material goods simply serve to bind us to the world,

and limit our freedom in Christ. When we think about it, stuff tends to increase our stress and general anxiety. God intends for us to use our many gifts and resources in His service, not worrying about whether someone might burgle our house, or steal our car, and not buying stuff we really don't need because we think it might make us happy.

Sharing God's peace is Jesus' next instruction to the disciples. You might be thinking that that really doesn't apply to modern missionaries like you and me. Yet if we understand what Luke is getting at, I think we'll see how important this is even today. For Luke, sharing God's peace is equivalent to offering salvation and healing through faith in Christ. It is more than living peacefully, with the assurance of safety and security; it includes the Jewish understanding of the greeting, *shalom*. That is, peace with justice, and desiring the very best for all those we meet. In other words, it is about considering and caring for others before self, which is part of Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves, and what we might call practicing God's graciousness as we fulfill our own Baptismal covenant.

Accepting the gift of hospitality is also a key part of being a missionary. As we saw earlier, traveling light leaves us vulnerable and potentially needy. Many of us are great at giving help, but very poor at receiving it. I won't ask for a show of hands, but it is good to reflect on how hard it is to ask for help – even when we know intellectually that we need help, and that those who would give us the help we need are also being blessed by the opportunity to serve us. Here's a small example from our common life. Each year, the Maundy Thursday service during Holy Week includes foot washing. There are still many who have a hard time with the foot washing part. Let's just say most people would be okay about washing someone else's feet, but still have reservations about accepting the gift of receiving a foot washing. It truly can be hard to accept the gift of hospitality, in the many and varied forms that God may offer it to us through others.

When the seventy return, they are all very happy with their own achievements and especially the new gift of healing. Jesus reminds them that the authority to heal was given by God, and it is still God who heals today – whether it is a miraculous answer to prayer, or through the hands of doctors and nurses. In the end, as God's children, we are merely recipients and/or conduits of God's grace and mercy. Jesus goes on to say some odd things about having watched Satan fall from heaven, and that we should rejoice in having our names written in heaven. What are we to make of this? Jesus is sharing yet another piece of divine wisdom, and it is wisdom that is still helpful for us today. The point Luke is making is that evil is already being conquered in Jesus' mission and ministry to the world. The final consummation of God's promise made through Jesus' victory over sin and death in His glorious resurrection will come. For now, we are living in the in-between times, yet always working to make manifest more of God's kingdom of love and peace in the world, despite the resistance we may experience. Ultimately, our work as missionaries is as important today as it was in the first century. We are empowered to offer evidence of God's love and desire for all to be reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ our Lord. The world *does* have many religions, including the worship of worldly possessions, but Jesus Christ is the Good News through whom we receive the gifts of salvation and healing, divine peace, and the hope of everlasting life. The gift of the Gospel is one we are all blessed to share.

Amen.