

## LUKE 10.1-12, 17-24 Ascension Church 7.7.2019

Jesus recruited a team of wandering preachers, heralds, evangelists for front-line duty. No, not seventy; seventy represents all the then known nations. In pairs, these beginners were sent ahead to villages and towns Jesus would visit on his way to die in Jerusalem. None had been students at Ridley or at Trinity. Like present Mormon door-knock evangelists, these internees would give their hearers a preview of Jesus' work. Their mission was to cure the sick and to proclaim that the coming of the Kingdom of God was near.

These advance-team were sent to the teeming crowds awaiting capture. These were Hilary Clinton's "deplorables," the ones we may wish to shrink from. In the hospital of the heart of Jesus the Physician, these may be sick, but are not incurable, because in his sight, there are none outside his loving care.

Sent out, they were told to greet no one on the road. Jesus was not being rude. He merely warned his influencers against being distracted by the normal Jewish custom of time-consuming roadside chats and socializing. Let nothing turn them aside from what they were called to do. Jesus speaks the same to us: Don't lose your focus or you may forget the mission that matters most. In 2019, the thought of the ego-driven "me alone" generation is geared towards the good life, a life of endless fulfilment and worldly success, a life morally incapable of placing the common good before one's own.

Then, the world harvest was huge and how few were the harvest hands! Will our spiritual harvest be as plentiful now, given that the "no religion" are the fastest growing group of unbelievers today? Many are the religious post-mortems that are spewed up by this clique that "God is Dead." The religiosity of other groups has become a rather do-it-yourself mistmash of cherry-picked strands of many religious traditions, which end up nowhere.

Our hearts should be broken with the things that break Jesus' heart. Matthew wrote "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless" [Matt.9.36]. We need to see the harvest as Jesus does, where everyone has a role to sow and to reap in his harvest field.

What Jesus told his enliveners seemed deceptively simple: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' Peace offered means "a blessing on this house." Jesus did not ask his novice-ambassadors to do a risk assessment first to check whether the house already followed the kosher way of the Patriarchs. He merely said "If anyone is there who shares the peace, your peace will rest on that person. If not, it will return to you." That is, if your offer of blessed peace is not welcome to be shared, Jesus does not advise scorn. He reassured his disciples that they have lost nothing. They can try Mrs Fiddlefop next door." Jesus says to us, "For God's sake, try to offer peace to all. Remember the hand we reach out to our neighbour is the hand first energized when we reach out to receive Him in communion.

Jesus knew that not everyone will accept the message; not everyone wants to be challenged. Jesus warns we will be met with a sweet "Parson, eh? well, pass on before I sool the cat onto you." For holding passe religious beliefs, we may be called a narrow-minded bigot, as Jesus is called a "back number." Jesus warned his seventy to expect resistance, rejection, ever more and more restriction from wolves intent on causing distraction, discouragement, despair and personal doubt.

Nothing has changed since his time. More Christians are being persecuted for their faith today than at any other time in human history, including the pagan Roman blood lust of the First Century. Christians then and now were lambs like himself, honest, approachable, but vulnerable, sent into the midst of ferocious meat eaters like mad Nero in Rome or Pilate in Jerusalem. He knew there was a name given those who tried to capture wolves, who tried to share the Good News of the kingdom; it was called dinner.

Those wolves still exist. There are today clever wolves, calculating wolves, wolves who seek to tear apart our present society. They pack-prowl over the whole field of public life to spew Mr. Trump's "fake news." These wolves subtly massage their negative message, that what is unacceptable is really OK. While increased smoking has returned to the silver screen as well as frequent product placement, the "Me Too" movement has exposed the wolves of the media casting couch. There are artistic wolves who cheapen the Church's value to reduce our faith to stage parsons with vacuous smiles, who babble banalities of irrelevance for a laugh. There are subversive wolves who seek to break up Christian values that we have long held as basic to community living as the current Victorian "assisted dying" legislation. Such wolves were surely behind the up-front removal of teaching religion in our State schools and the quiet removal of same from our church schools, so that our students will emerge beautiful, brilliant, but utterly pagan.

There have been frequent false messiahs who upset people in the past. Thus, Jesus advises us not to argue or threaten damnation if not welcomed. Do not become paralyzed trying to work out where we went wrong in our approach, or how could we have carried out our work differently. Just signal your sadness by shaking the dust off your feet. You know that the kingdom of God has come near. Move on to try again to share the good news.

The disciples overcame their fears, and, like reapers bringing the harvest home, they returned amazed and jubilant with golden sheaves of success stories that their word preached and their hands laid on had proved such a powerful resource for world change. "Lord, in your name, even the demons submit to us. We trod on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and we were immune to all hurt."

In this wow moment, the novices realized that they were now truly a part of what Jesus was doing. They realized that their little toe-in-the-water-mission was just a small foretaste of the whole world dream of "Christ for the world, and the world for Christ." And Jesus beamed, "See my kingdom come! Watch my kingdom grow!"

We all want to be successful in our ministry for Jesus. As the heralds felt the high thrill of success in healing the sick, in preaching the Word, so they were humbled to realize that they were a necessary part of the Lord working through them as he wills to work through us. Yet, Jesus cut short their feeling that they were celebrities in a hall of fame, as he tells us, too: "Yes, you are making a moral difference to folk beyond yourselves. You are part of something larger than yourselves. Rejoice, rather, that your names are written in heaven," which means written into eternity.

We are his ambassadors of good will sent out to encourage the ripening of golden grain by our acts of forgiveness and peacemaking, by loving kindness and gentleness, and by sincere consolation. Teresa of Avila counsels: "Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out

to the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go abroad doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.”

As you leave Ascension today, imagine there is a sign above the door “You are now entering the mission field.” Thanks be to God.