

3Jul2022 Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Sermon – Being Sent out

We've just been singing our praises for our God, who is awesome in power yet for us, whose love for us is vast beyond all measure, whose forgiveness and embrace we know. As Jesus says to his followers at the end of today's gospel account, "rejoice that your names are written in heaven". This is central to our whole life. But it is also why we can be assumed that we want to witness to Jesus, why we would be intentional about sharing the news of his Kingdom, why we would be overflowing with what Jesus has already done for us, not just in passionate song but in what we share with others who do not yet experience this.

This passage from Luke's gospel is about how Jesus sent out a large number of his followers to go and witness to him and his bringing of the Kingdom of God. As his followers experienced, Jesus didn't just keep them close, comfortably within his orbit but he also sent them out ahead to bring his message too. If we are his followers then we are also sent out of our comfort-zone to bring his message. As Jesus said in John 20:21 – 'As the Father has sent me so I send you'. So I'd like to just go through this account and bring out aspects of how Jesus sent people out and what happened. That may help us think about what we might say and do in our interactions with others who do not know him as we are sent out into the world here.

1 After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

Jesus sent out his followers 2 by 2. They weren't going alone. This is why Paul never works alone either. This is a bit of a challenge to our individualism. We aren't supposed to do it by ourselves, to be stunning individual witnesses to God. Then practically - If you've ever been in a conversation with someone and the conversation moves to being about God or your Christian faith you'll know that if you have a friend with you who also has a relationship with Jesus it is much easier to be able to share. You know that at least someone in the conversation can understand what you are saying. Perhaps they can ask a question you hadn't thought to ask, or clarify what you have said from their own perspective to help get something across clearly, or they can reinforce what you have said by adding a story of their own experience of God in their lives, etc. So this makes a lot of sense. But of course we might end up talking with someone by ourselves. To some extent if we would like to be intentional about bringing God into the conversation in some way then having prayed with Christian friends together regularly for the opportunity and words to say, means we at least have had others involved with us in our witnessing. Do we do this often enough!? We also hope that soon you may be able to rely on God to work through your Christian brothers and sisters at the shared meals – being able to invite friends - and praying that they may come to know Christ through the others there as much as through yourself.

Jesus sent his followers to places where he was about to go. However Luke never mentions Jesus going to those places later. But you see when Jesus' followers go somewhere they take Jesus' presence with them, Jesus' Spirit – the Holy Spirit is in us! The 70 functioned actually as Jesus' presence in those places where they were sent. The Kingdom of God is present in Jesus' ministry and becomes present in the ministry of those who are sent out in his name. It is not just a matter of 'finding out what God is doing and joining in' as is sometimes said but also finding out what God wants to do but cannot until we step out for him!

So where are we sent to? We obviously aren't going on short or long term missions or being sent into different towns or places we don't usually go to. In fact I suspect most of us see mostly the same people week on week. We know the people we see and meet each week. Yet we are still sent people, people Jesus is calling to step out for him. As we listen to what Jesus says to his followers in the rest of the passage we also need to be thinking about the people we usually meet,

the people who serve us from time to time, and perhaps the neighbours we often or sometimes see but don't often talk to or take an interest in.

2 He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Most of the time these days, when we look at trying to bring our faith into a conversation or share something of Jesus with someone, we are ready to do so but it seems those listening are just not interested. But Jesus here is saying exactly the opposite: the harvest is there and ready and all that is needed is for workers to go out and reap it. So why do we so often feel as if it is the other way around? Are we just so scared to say anything which we think might compromise a friendship or neighbourly relations when there really are many around us who would be open if we were just to open our mouths? I was listening to someone talking about this passage last week and they shared that they had been relating to the non-Christian spouse of a church goer for years and happened to be in a car with them one day so asked them to a course introducing them to Christianity. The reply was – I thought you were never going to ask? After the course they became a keen follower of Christ. Sometimes we just need to speak! We also need to think about how we are approaching the harvest. What are we saying to people? Are we really doing what Jesus is asking us to do if we find ourselves trying to speak of God or our faith or our relationship with Jesus and it is falling on deaf ears or just causing an argument we can't win?

3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.

In fact it does feel like we are going like lambs among the wolves when we try and talk about these things! And Jesus does seem to be suggesting for the 70 that the whole enterprise is to be done in a very risky way, without even the basic provisions. It is a bit like us going to speak to friends who have all the arguments while we don't. But I don't think this is the case – as the next verses make a bit clearer.

5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.

Jesus actually tells the 70 to only share the good news with those who are what we might call 'people of peace'. They were to stay in the place that accepted their blessing of peace. As Jesus followers were bringing his kingdom presence with them, they carried with them the ability to bring the peace of Jesus with them. And when that real peace was received it was so good that people would be willing to feed and house those who brought it. People receiving that peace that comes with the Kingdom of God, with the presence of Jesus, were willing to support those who brought it because they appreciated its value. So when we carry the peace of Jesus with us, and people are open to this – are people of peace themselves – then we can share of our faith, of the good news that transformed us into a bringer of peace. And there are people who long for that – part of the harvest that is ready.

This is part of our story as the Jesus followers in this land. When the gospel was brought to the tangata whenua about 2 centuries ago it was the gospel of peace that was heard, the gospel which gives us a way to bring peace and forgiveness rather than vengeance or retribution to those who hurt us. We are in spiritual continuity with that. Listening to and reading the news today it seems to me most people are looking to criticize and fight all those they think bring harm to them and our society. What a different message we can bring if we come to all these issues with an attitude of peace, forgiveness and restoration.

These words of Jesus assure that people would support those bringing the words of peace because they value the message. I think we often assume that we need to do good to people first as a sort of recompense for the fact that we are asking for the privilege of bringing the gospel – the good we do is buying the right to be heard. Jesus here assumes that the good news in itself is enough of a blessing – and that those who hear it will be so grateful for it that they will be more than happy to recompense us in some way. Can we imagine this? I'd love to explore ways in which the peace and forgiveness of God can be applied to today's personal, local and international issues with any of you in conversation at our shared meals or over coffee. We need to think about how peace can be applied to the issue of the day and be ready to reply to people's complaints, criticisms, despair with questions, first to really hear their anguish about their world and then, "Have you considered this way of peace...?"

This also means we can come to people without having to rely on our own clever arguments which probably won't even convince the determined atheist or agnostic anyway. At this point I heave a great sigh of relief – that Jesus isn't necessarily calling me to confront those antagonistic to church or Jesus with conversation about God. Instead I need to be carrying Jesus' peace with me, taking an interest in where people are at, and looking out for those who, when I bring my Jesus-centred perspective on matters or I appropriately mention my faith or demonstrate it in prayer, respond positively, so that there is a chance to share more deeply.

8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

Then Jesus advised his followers to eat what is set before them – ie to accept whatever the person who is open to their message might actually offer them in gratitude while it may not normally be acceptable to them! (eg not according to their Jewish religious sensitivities) Sometimes we may find that someone who is open to hearing of our faith and the good news about Jesus peace may not be the sort of person we would usually get on with! Accepting all the food they were offered also required the humility to receive. They were vulnerable as they didn't provide for themselves. I know of many stories and have seen in my own circumstances that people who know someone is a Christian are quite affected by being asked for something or having the Christian accept something from them. That humility and vulnerability reassures them and opens their hearts a bit more to hearing whatever we may have to say. Being willing to receive is a gentle way of establishing a relationship and for many non-westerners is essential. We are not acting top down, as those who have the stuff, those who know it all.

These instructions Jesus gives here encompass much of what we are to do in our witness – to accept hospitality or whatever someone may want to do for you, to heal the sick, or drive out demons as the disciples later said they were seeing happen, and tell people about the Kingdom of God. The healing and deliverance is what Jesus was doing in his active proclamation of the Kingdom of God. So we are to proclaim God's kingdom come in Jesus, in word and action, ie both speak about Jesus and what his reign means in our lives and for the world and act in praying for and caring for people as a means of showing what God's reign looks like. Jesus followers were instructed to say – the KOG has come near to you. Jesus said that first from the very beginning of his ministry – that is another pointer to that fact that we as Jesus followers bring the presence of Jesus. But word and action are definitely involved. The followers sent out didn't just have a regional holiday and expect people to sense they were different as Jesus followers and ask them about Jesus!

10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' 16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

And unfortunately those who rejected Jesus followers were rejecting him. Jesus is himself in some way present and at work in the ministry of those he has sent. So those who rejected his followers were rejecting not only Jesus but also the one who had sent him, God himself. They remain lost despite having had the opportunity to be saved this time. I feel a little portion of God's sorrow and pain when my friends and relatives continue to be closed to anything I bring from a Christian perspective, or say about my faith, about God or his works or the ways in which God works in my life.

17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" 18 He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. 19 See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

After having been sent out with nothing to rely upon but God's presence with them the disciples come back with Joy. It wasn't as difficult as they may have thought. They see the most significant confirmation of Jesus' words to them and the authority he had given them in the power they had over demons – the coming of the Kingdom of God means freedom from every foreign power that occupies the human soul. Jesus has won the victory over the powers of evil, and he has invited us into his victory, and commissioned us to share that victory with others. If we know his love for us, if we know what he did for us in dying and rising for us and defeating death so that 'our names are written in heaven', if we see that as the best news ever, then we will be ready to be sent out as his followers and share that good news, and invite others to follow him too. And Jesus insists on keeping the main thing the main thing: for all those who get sent out, all of us, the focus and celebration is not to be the 'success' of that witnessing but on the security that comes from knowing the love of God as we participate within his Kingdom.

So what can we resolve to do as sent-out followers knowing God's salvation in our own lives. Start thinking about what is the perspective of Christ-like peace that applies to what those you know speak about. Pray for the opportunity to speak to the friend or neighbor and take an interest in their views, their life. And pray often for God's Spirit to soften their hearts and open their eyes and for yourself for the courage to ask the simple questions God gives you so that you can proclaim to them the Kingdom of God come through Jesus.

Let us be intentional in the witnessing Jesus has sent us out to do and let us even now pray for Jesus Spirit to fill us that we might carry his presence and words of peace with us, that we might recognize the person of peace – the person who is open and part of the ready harvest and that we might in humility and vulnerability be able to proclaim God's Kingdom in words and actions. Let us pray.