

Epworth Chapel on the Green
July 4, 2010
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Kingdomtide)
The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 66:10-16
Psalm 66:1-8
Galatians 6:1-18
Luke 10:1-20

Our Gospel lesson for today can be instructive for us because in it we may find an analogy for how the Church of today is to proclaim the message of the Gospel to the world. In this analogy we may find help both in understanding the message and ourselves as *messengers*. We can gain insight about the message we are to share, and the kind of messengers we are to be in the sharing.

Luke begins by telling us the Lord chooses and sends out 72 other disciples. In Matthew and Mark, only the 12 are sent out, so this seems rather odd. Luke probably has in mind here a reference to 70 nations in Genesis 10 which describes the descendants of Noah's sons after the great flood. Luke is probably anticipating here the mission begun to the nations after Pentecost, where people of all backgrounds and walks of life gathered.

And in fact, Gentiles may be in mind here for Luke when he has Jesus telling his messengers, "eat what is set before you" (v.8)

These details remind us again today of the fact that the message we have for the world is a message for the *whole* world. It is Good News for *all* people.

And not only is the message for all people, but the message we share never changes. It is always the same message. We never have to worry about changes or new directives coming down from headquarters. We don't have to prepare new power point slides or edit video productions. The message is always the same, and always conveys this Good News: *The Kingdom of God has drawn near. God has acted in Jesus Christ to fulfill God's plan for the world and to bring salvation to all people.*

This is indeed Good News. But news of any kind, whether good or bad, is never met with the same response by those who hear it. And so it is with the Gospel. Jesus makes it clear that the message will be accepted by some, and rejected by others. And Jesus' emissaries and messengers are not called on to judge others for how they respond to the message. That function is reserved for Jesus. Messengers and emissaries are responsible for *proclamation*, not *outcomes*.

Related to this, the series of "woes" Jesus pronounces on these cities here remind us of a valuable lesson. These cities were blessed and privileged, in that Jesus had been to them before and had done amazing things there. But for whatever reason, the message still wasn't accepted and people did not repent. But their privileged status meant that they would be held to a higher standard. To whom much is given, much will be required.

One cannot help but wonder about North America and other parts of the world where blessings have been many, and where folks have been privileged compared to other places in the world. Will North America and other places be held to a higher standard? I don't know. But it can be a frightening thing to enjoy God's favor.

So, the message of the Gospel is for all, and the message never changes. It is a message that in Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God is near and that God's plan is coming to fulfillment. The Church proclaims this message with the full awareness that it will be met with both acceptance and rejection. And we respond to rejection of the message not with judgment, but by simply moving on.

Now, what about the messengers? Can we learn more about *who* we are to be as we share the Gospel with the world?

We can. From Jesus' instructions here, we learn that the lives of God's messengers are to be characterized by *simplicity* and *urgency*.

Urgency permeates our lives because we live with the constant awareness that the completion of God's plan *is* coming to pass. Time is of the essence. The harvest imagery here reminds us of that. There is no time to be sidetracked or distracted. Messengers are not to pile up extra material belongings that they ultimately don't need, but instead are to be dependent upon others and their

hospitality. Urgency characterizes their lives because the shadow of the harvest hangs over them. That shadow burns away all distractions, material and otherwise.

Finally, the last portion of our text can teach us something about how to handle success in the sharing of the Gospel message.

The messengers Jesus sends out return to him with the news of what has happened. “Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name!”

“Yes,” says Jesus, “and I saw Satan falling from heaven as a flash of lightning, and I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you.”

We should note here that Jesus’ response is not just a description of what has *just happened* to the disciples on their initial journey. Their successful mission prompts Jesus’ reply, but his reply is not confined to this mission. He is also speaking of what is yet to happen when these disciples receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and begin to spread Jesus’ mission to the world.

In fact, you can read specific descriptions of the things he describes here in the book of Acts as the young Church begins to share the Gospel message. There is even the recording of immunity from the strike of a serpent in Acts 28:3-6.

But the real lesson that messengers should take from any success in ministry is what comes next. Jesus says, “don’t rejoice because evil spirits obey you;

rejoice because your names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Rejoice because you are registered as citizens of heaven.”

For all of us in the Church who are called to share the message, we should not become prideful at any victories we might enjoy, whether large or small. We should not rejoice in our own gifts, cleverness, or become triumphalistic about our methods or strategies. Our joy and our pride should come from the simple fact that God loves us, and has welcomed us as citizens of heaven.

As we continue our journey through this season of Kingomtide, where we explore what it means that the Spirit has given birth to the Church and launched it on its mission, these words of Jesus today are helpful to us.

For they help us to see again that the message of God's love we share is a message for all people. Whosoever will may come.

It's a message that never changes. We don't need continual upgrades of the software. It's just the simple message that God's Kingdom has come among us in Jesus Christ, and that God's plan is moving toward fulfillment. God is saving and healing the world, and all things are being made new.

Some will welcome this news, others will not. How others respond does not concern us. Our only concern is to share the message.

And when folks do respond to the message, it's not because of our giftedness or cleverness or power or persuasion. It's because the Holy Spirit is

active in our midst, and is drawing people to Jesus. Our joy, then, comes not from any outward display or measure of success. *Our joy comes from being included in the work that God is doing.* Surely this is what it means, in part, that the Spirit has come to the Church.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.