

7th Sunday after Pentecost
Year C - 3/7/2016

2 Kings 5:1-14
Psalm 30
Galatians 6:1-18
Luke 10:1-24

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

Many of you here, I am sure, will remember the 1990's! Maybe they were good years for you; maybe not. But I'm sure if you thought about it you would be able to remember where you were living, what you were doing, and some significant things that happened in your life during that decade leading up to the new Millenium.

For myself, it's pretty easy really. The 1990's were great for me. I was working in a job I loved - nursing at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. And if that weren't enough, I had the bonus of meeting a young nurse called Kate, falling in love, and getting married and starting a family together. Yes, the 1990's were good to me.

I wonder how many of you remember the other important thing about the 1990's - it was a world-wide event, but no, not the collapse of the Soviet Union, the death of Princess Diana, or even the release of the first Harry Potter book - but it was... The Decade of Evangelism!!!!

"Ah, of course", you say! Or do you? The Lambeth Conference of 1988 decreed that the decade of the 1990's would be a world-wide event; not just for Anglicans but for any other denominations who wanted join in this push - the push to evangelise the world by the year 2000. Now, even allowing for the fact that this was a pretty big ask - the whole world by 2000, I think it is fair to say that things did not go well in this regard. One person was even harsh enough to call it not the Decade of Evangelism, but rather the Decayed Evangelism. Ouch!

Well, it seems that this effort of the 1990's was not the first targeted push for evangelism - indeed, today's Gospel tells us about the first one - not instigated by a motion passed at a conference of the Bishops of the world, but one personally instituted and blessed by our Saviour. And on the surface of it, it doesn't really seem to have a lot going for it.

70 people sent out - that's all. Not 7000 or even 700. Just 70. (incidentally, around the same number that we have worshipping regularly with us throughout the week). And what about the instructions they are given - not ones to fill them with confidence, I would have thought. "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves". And "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals."

And what strikes me is the simplicity of the instruction Jesus gives them - "Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" Bringing God's peace. That was the essence of the mission. That was the primary thing Jesus commanded these 70. Not "go and tell everyone how they must repent to be saved". Not "go and make sure they are all going to church regularly".

Bring God's peace to the world. Show God's peace to them.

If there was ever to be a new decade of evangelism instigated, I hope that it would be this simple - bring God's peace to this troubled and divided world. Seek out people of peace in the world and pray for them and with them - discover what God is already doing in people's lives and in the lives of communities everywhere and join in! And on the other side of the coin - be attentive to where your message of peace is *not* being received. And if it is not, leave there, and shake the dust off your feet as you leave.

Jesus says "don't waste your effort in those places - don't bang your heads against a wall when there is no hope there." We know from many of his parables that Jesus loved the horticultural and farming images.

To me, this command to the 70 is a bit like looking at a patch of dirt that is so barren, so rock-hard, one that never sees sunlight or rain, and deciding - there is nothing that is going to grow here. I am not going to waste my time, my energy, my precious seeds in trying to grow anything here. And moving on.

The question of course is how we make that discernment. Sometimes, as I say, it is just that obvious - the ground is clearly barren. But other times we might look at something and not quite know - is this where I am called to minister? Is this where I am called to bring God's peace? How do we know?

Richard Rohr, in one of his writings this week spoke of how contemplative prayer is so important in all of our discernment. He said that the gift of contemplation will be experienced as freedom, abundance, love, spaciousness, and grace. In fact, Rohr says, "I would say that utter gratitude is one of the clearest indicators of any authentic God experience. But it also installs its own critique. When you know the real thing, you start developing a nose, an eye, and an ear for the false thing. You can recognize truly converted people. And you can smell people who are just using the church, sacraments, or priesthood to aggrandize themselves. For them it's still all about "me." When you move to the level of divine mind, the mind of Christ, you know it's not all about you. In fact, it is all about God!"

It's all about God. Again, when we consider our mission and our ministry as Christians we do well to remember that important fact - it's not actually about us, but rather all about God.

In fact, it is so much about God that it is really liberating. And it is precisely the reason why Jesus sends the 70 out on their mission with nothing like a purse or a staff or sandals. It is a reminder to them of their utter reliance not on things of the world but on things of God - on God's grace, and presence, and promise.

In the same way, as we go out seeking to bring God's peace we do so utterly reliant on God to give us the words to speak and the actions to undertake. We need only look back through the pages of Scripture to see how often the great men and women of the faith doubted themselves; but how through God's strength they were themselves strong.

Jesus sends out the 70 disciples for mission. As he does so he tells them the following:

- It will not be easy - they will be like lambs going into the midst of wolves
- They will not be able to rely on anything earthly to help them in their mission, but that God will be with them
- They are to bring God's peace to those they meet
- They are not to waste their time and their energy in places where it is clear that God's peace is not welcome
- They are reminded that it is not about them, but that it is all about God.

In the same way, we are sent out, with the same rejoinders, but importantly with the same promise - the promise of God's power with us, as we seek, in our own lives, to bring God's peace to the world.

In the name of Christ. Amen.