

Sunday 18th Oct. 2020

Sermon on Luke 10: 1-9

In Luke's gospel, in chapter 9, verses 1-6, we read of Jesus calling together his disciples to give them their instructions; their job description, if you like. Now I am sure many of you have received similar instructions which attempt to formalise your job and which seem to bear very little to what you actually do. Jesus' instructions, were specific, however. 'Take nothing for the journey; no staff, no bag; no bread; no money; no extra tunic.' This doesn't seem such a good idea to me: I always like to be well prepared. Yet the disciples set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere. And then reported back to Jesus.

Now, in the gospel reading today, Luke chapter 10, verses 1-9, we read of Jesus appointing 72 more disciples and sending them two by two ahead to every town where he was about to go. Again, he gives explicit instructions; "Do not

take a purse or bag or sandals and do not greet anybody on the road.”

Now, I’m not sure about you, but to me the whole idea seems a bit dodgy. Remember where they were. In a land of deserts, wild animals and bandits. Jesus admits this, he says, “I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.”

Incidentally, there has been considerable discussion between scholars about the number of disciples sent on the second mission as some manuscripts give 72 disciples and others 70. Apparently, the original Greek text is ambiguous, as in Genesis, in chapter 10, where the nations of the world are numbered. In the Hebrew text there are 70 nations in the world; while the Greek translation give 72.

Unfortunately, I speak neither language! But I am happy to think that Luke is meaning that the mission of the disciples is to all the world, as indeed is ours today!

This helps us to understand why there are two similar accounts in Luke's gospel; this one and an earlier one in the previous chapter.

The first, in chapter 9 describes the mission to Israel, to the twelve tribes and the second, the one read today in the Acts of the Apostles, to the non-Jewish nations.

So, to return to chapter 10, today's gospel reading. The first words of those disciples sent out were to be "Peace be to this house." Today a traditional greeting would probably be *Shalom*. The disciples were expected to share the hospitality that was offered and to stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever was provided. That in itself was unusual because the disciples were Jews, used to eating ritually clean food. Jesus was saying that theirs was a mission to all; Jew and non Jew alike.

Similarly, they were required to heal the sick and to tell them that "The kingdom of God is near you." And they were to care not only for the sick, but also the dying, the sad, the lonely, the hurt and the anxious.

It is this second mission, which seems to be more dangerous. Jesus says, “I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals and do not greet anyone on the road.

The first words that they should say are, “Peace be to this house”.

This means more than the traditional greeting of *Shalom*. Luke emphasises that this mission is to bring peace to all who will receive it. He uses this idea throughout his gospel; as the angels sang at Jesus’ birth, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.”

We are in an increasingly difficult situation at the moment with a growing rise of coronavirus cases and uncertainty about our future. We are not ‘at peace’ in any sense of the word.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this is a sense of helplessness. I suspect many of us feel that we should be doing something but that there is nothing to be done.

But, as members of Christ's family there is something that must be done and that is to pray. I know that my prayers are often inward-seeking, concerned with my own problems. They may be generalised and unfocused, a repetition of words that are so familiar that they lose their meaning. But we must pray!

Luke wrote nearly a quarter of the New Testament: one of the longest of the Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles. But who was he? Tradition says that he accompanied Paul on some of his journeys but we know he was not one of the twelve disciples. Tradition also suggests that he was a physician. Yet he listened, researched, wrote and, above all believed in the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Perhaps his gift was to open our eyes so that we too can see and believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, as he did, and through prayer and devotion, seek the help of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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