

Small Group Faith Fellowship #2

Week of Sunday, October 18, 2015 – Saint Luke the Evangelist (Trinity XX)

Prayer Book, p. 253

2 Timothy 4:5-15

Luke 10:1-7b

Background:

That We are Sent: Mission Responsibility

Taught by our consumerist, narcissistic culture, Christians can often be passive consumers of religious experience. But in the teaching of this feast, we learn that disciples of Jesus are those who he calls to share his life, his teaching, his daily bread – and his mission, to gather the elect people of God into his kingdom, by the preaching of the gospel. He calls us into community with himself – and he sends us out to share that community with others. This Sunday's sermon alluded to a:

common trap of Christians in our culture. We live in a consumerist culture, a narcissistic culture - it's all about me, and my needs, tastes, opinions, and whether they are being met and gratified - and we may unconsciously carry that attitude into our religion, as passive consumers of religious experience. When this happens, we make it a religion that is all about us and our needs. But if you have known Christ, then you know it is not about you - it is about him. If he calls us to him, and blesses us, it is so that we can be a blessing to others. If he serves us, it is so that we may serve others. As he has shared himself with us, so we share ourselves with **him**. We put ourselves at his disposal; we subordinate our needs, our tastes, our opinions, to his word, to his will.

To be a Christian is to be sent to bear witness to the gospel, to take part in the mission of Christ to gather God's elect people into his kingdom. We are "labourers in the harvest".

How we are sent: Mission Strategy & Message

Jesus' **mission strategy** for the 70 is set out in today's gospel lesson. They are sent forth like labourers in a harvest and like messengers on a matter of life and death – not carrying moneybag, knapsack, or extra pair of shoes; "salute no man by the way" - nothing must slow them down or distract them from the task of delivering the message to its destination. And when they arrive at their destination, Jesus tells them: "into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again " – the benefit is lost. The momentous consequences of that rejection and loss are set out more fully in the verses that follow the reading, 10:10-16.

The **message** is a message of peace – not just absence of conflict, but the fullness of well-being that comes when man is restored to right relationship with God, and the whole creation to right order under his loving rule. It is the peace of God's kingdom, the peace of sins forgiven, man at peace with God, and living under his grace and blessing. This is the peace that Christ has won for us by his death upon the cross. In the house where it is delivered by the emissaries of Christ, and received by the "son of peace" (Biblical idiom for someone who is open to and receptive of the peace that Christ offers us in the gospel), that peace abides and the harvest of God's elect takes place. Where it is rejected, however, that peace does not abide, and judgment, rather than salvation, follows.

Moreover, the emissary is then to stay in the same house, "eating and drinking such things as they give, for the labourer is worthy of his hire". That is, where that message of peace is received in faith, house-churches and table-fellowship are established, where the faithful gather to celebrate the coming of God's kingdom, in readiness to receive Jesus and provide hospitality for him on the way, as well as base of local mission. It is a mission strategy that we still have today: for the house-churches evolved into parish churches; and the table-fellowship into the Church's eucharistic fellowship. So each parish is the mission of Christ in this place, where the faithful gather in Eucharistic fellowship, and from which they disperse to bear witness to him in their lives.

Why we go: Mission Motivation

Why are Christians ready to suffer and sacrifice for the sake of the gospel mission? In today's epistle lesson, St. Paul tell us, as he was facing death as a martyr for the sake of the gospel:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

The desire for Christ's appearing makes Christians willing to sacrifice legitimate pleasures to do something better - because we don't count on the world to meet our deepest needs. It's why Christians are willing to suffer without despair or self-pity - because we know the world is a place of suffering (lambs among wolves!) - but we expect a better world from God. That's why we persevere in obedience in the face of temptation - because we would rather "finish my course" and win the crown than throw in the towel and lose all.

Open:

What did you hear in this Sunday's teaching? What struck you the most?

Was there anything that was new to you, or surprised you?

Was there anything that puzzled you? anything you did not understand?

Did it raise any questions or issues for you?

Dig:

What do you think it means to speak of “**passive consumers of religious experience**”? What is the difference between that and being disciples of the Lord who are “**sent before his face...**” on a mission?

Jesus compares their mission to that of field workers bringing in the harvest: “The harvest truly is great but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth labourers into his harvest”. What do you think this image of the harvest says about the mission of Christ and his disciples? What is its purpose? How is it done?

What is the role of Christians in this mission, as individuals and corporately?

Jesus gives instructions to his disciples about “eating and drinking in one house, for the labourer is worthy of his hire”. The allusion is to the reward of the harvest labourers, which is that they take part in the harvest feast. The goal of the mission is to establish a “house-church” in every city and place where Christ is going to come, where believers gather in “table-fellowship” to celebrate the harvest of God’s kingdom and to prepare for Christ’s coming. The house-church and its table-fellowship evolved into the Eucharistic fellowship of the local parish church, as an outpost of Christ’s mission in one city or place.

What is the nature and purpose of the local church in the mission of Christ? What is the role of Eucharistic “table-fellowship”? If the Church is a community of disciples for the mission of Christ, what are its priorities? What are ours?

In what ways can we deliver the message of the peace of God?

In the epistle lesson (2 Timothy 4:6-8) St. Paul looks forward to his imminent death for the sake of the gospel, looks back to his long perseverance in the mission of Christ, and speaks about his own motivation in these terms: *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* What does this tell us about the motivation for this mission? Why are Christians willing to shift from being religious consumers to being disciples in mission?

Close:

What part of this Sunday's teaching do you think needs further exploration?

How might this Sunday's teaching be applied in your life?

Pray:

Thank God for bringing everyone together in fellowship for the sharing of faith. Thank him for the gift of his Word and Spirit, and ask him for help to know and experience more fully the gift of his grace in your life.

Scriptures

St. Luke 10:1-7

10 After these things the LORD appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. **2** Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. **3** Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. **4** Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. **5** And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. **6** And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. **7** And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire.

2 Timothy 4:5-15

5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. **6** For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. **7** I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: **8** Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. **9** Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: **10** For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. **11** Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry. **12** And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus. **13** The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments. **14** Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: **15** Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.