

Sent To Serve (Luke 10:1-20) 07/04/10.

Introduction.

When my kids were teenagers living at home they groaned when I quoted a particular English saying, which goes like this **"why keep dogs and bark yourself?"** Saying this was a prelude of course to my giving them a task -cutting the grass, taking out the garbage, walking the dog etc. In one sense in our Gospel passage today Jesus seems to be saying **"why keep dogs and bark yourself?"** Instead let others share the load.

But there is a note of real urgency here. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and, knowing what awaits him there-final rejection, arrest and death he knows that this is the last time he will come this way. If the people here do not respond to his teaching today it may be too late. So he wants to maximize the opportunity for all to hear by enlisting the assistance of the 70.

Only Luke tells us of this mission of the 70 and there are two intriguing questions about this story. Some manuscripts read not 70 but 72 are sent out and secondly what is the significance of this number?

Repeatedly in his Gospel Luke draws parallels between Jesus and Moses actions. Here they are very striking. Remember when Moses choose 70 elders, who were then equipped with the Spirit, to assist him in his ministry (Numbers11:16-30). Two men who were not part of the group of 70 chosen by Moses, Eldad and Medad, began to minister also. Joshua was horrified and reported the matter to him, expecting Moses to order them to desist. Instead Moses commented that it would be wonderful if all of God's people took on ministry like these had.

In the previous chapter of Luke (9:49-50) John, one of Jesus disciples, reports to him that he found that someone who was not part of their group ministering to folks in need. John told him to stop ministering in this way since **'he was not one of them'**. Jesus responded **"Don't stop him. If he's not an enemy, he's an ally."** By emphasizing these parallels Luke is saying that Jesus, as a second Moses, enlists others to help in achieving a second Exodus-this time not a journey from physical slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, but release from those spiritual powers which enslave all people. Jesus mission is to rescue all from this slavery.

In the original Exodus the people of Israel, rebelled, grumbled, and constantly looked for things to complain about. Why? Because they did not want to go the direction that God was leading them. They blamed Moses for every inconvenience and challenge. On occasions they were ready to dump him as their leader. That was also the experience of Jesus. Despite all the healings, demonstrations of power, clarity and shrewdness of his

teachings, most Israel rejected Jesus as God's Messiah and refused to go the way that he wanted to lead them.

At the heart of Jesus call was a message of peace. So the 70 were instructed to bring a message of peace to every house and see if there was anyone present who also was committed to peace. For the most part Jesus contemporaries did not want peace-not with the Samaritans nor the Romans-rather they wanted their Messiah to engage in all out war punishing their enemies and getting rid of them once and for all.

The Kingdom of God which was coming into being through Jesus was the exact opposite of what most of Israel was expecting or hoping for. For Jesus the idea of fighting evil with violence and killing was like Israel of old returning to Egypt. Remember how, before he was called of God to lead God's people out of slavery in Egypt, Moses tried violence to counter oppression and injustice-he killed a Egyptian who was beating an Israelite slave and it proved to be a complete disaster. Later, on the occasion of his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter attempted to use force to protect his Master, Jesus rejected that idea saying "**those who live by the sword will perish by the sword**". Jesus knew that the God of Israel was **not** a God using violence and killing to achieve his ends, but one who gave love, grace and healing power with those who embraced his call. His way was rejected and dismissed by many as impractical and soft. Sadly it is often written off in the same way today.

I lived In South Africa during the worst of the Apartheid era. State sponsored violence, killing and oppression were everyday realities. Many "fell" from high windows when being interrogated by the Security Police. Some in opposition opted to fight violence with violence, but most did not finding instead powerful, non violent ways of defeating oppression. For example beaches were segregated, but lots of church people would gather as a huge multi-racial group and all go to one particular beach-the authorities were helpless. Later when Apartheid was overturned Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa. He had spent almost 30 years in prison without ever being brought to trial. Rather than seeking revenge on those who had treated him in this way, he choose to offer forgiveness and reconciliation to all.

But not all said '**thanks but no thanks**' to the message of Jesus. The 70 returned saying that for those who accepted the message there was salvation- release from slavery and oppression and healing and hope. Today it is just the same. Many reject Jesus invitation to enter his kingdom, but for those who accept there is healing, hope and transformation. Now as then, we are not protected from all pain, hardship, suffering and even death but we are part of Jesus new community through which the life giving power of God flows.

The terrible tragedy was that rejection of Jesus by the nation meant that the die was cast for Israel. By turning away from God and his ways, destruction and death became inevitable. Less than 40 years later the Roman legions would utterly destroy Jerusalem, kill and scatter large numbers of its inhabitants and render its Temple an utter ruin. Today we struggle with the aftermath of those events.

There are two practical applications for us to reflect on today.

First we are **all** called by Jesus to be a laborer and work for the extension of his Kingdom. We are not all called to all do the same task, but we are all called to do some tasks. Some of us will have very practical tasks, feeding the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless. Others are called to proclaim the good news of God in Christ in our communities. The work is demanding, not everyone will appreciate or respond positively to our efforts but **"the harvest is plentiful"**. Sadly however all too often the laborers are few. The challenge is **all of us need to step up to the plate**. So my question for us all to reflect on is **'what is God calling me, what is God calling you to do to further his Kingdom? To bring peace, healing, hope and justice to people who desperately need to know these.'**

Second, have we ourselves fully accepted the invitation to become a member of Jesus Kingdom? Have we come to recognize the futility of violence, oppression and hatred as means of gaining security and achieving our goals? Today we are celebrating Independence Day. God has richly blessed this nation ever since it came into being. Today we can celebrate having wonderful freedoms- of speech, of assembly, of religion, of an unfettered press, of due process of law. As individuals and a nation we face many challenges today; terrorism and economic problems to mention a couple. Our challenge as Christian citizens is to consistently live out the values and priorities of God's Kingdom, especially in our treatment of others. Amen