

PENTECOST IV Proper 9 July 7, 2019 St. Alban's Staten Island

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus "has set his face to go to Jerusalem." He understands full well all that the journey ahead will entail even if he has not yet had much luck convincing the disciples of this approaching reality. So, he is focused on the cost of discipleship for his followers after he is gone. And he is widening his scope to include a larger number of apostles to join the 12 in the enterprise of announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God. They are being called upon to proclaim a whole new way of life, and he is providing "a kind of internship, a training time while he is still with them."

"He sends seventy ahead of him and prepares them for what lies ahead. The laborers are few and the risks are great. Jesus sends them in pairs with no provisions for the journey. No conversing with those they meet on the road. They will depend on the hospitality of strangers. He instructs them to move on if a town does not welcome them, with a sign of judgment against that place." That judgment is expressed symbolically in the act of wiping the dust of that town from the missionaries' feet. For Israel to reject this message would be particularly consequential given their past record of rejecting all of the prophets sent by God.

We are not certain whether we are dealing here with 70 or 72 new apostles because different texts use different numbers. The number itself could signify the fact that Jesus is sending these new recruits *into the whole world*.

This is because in Genesis 10, the number of countries listed is 70, while in later texts the number is 72 nations. Another possibility is a reference to Moses gathering 70 elders to be given a share of his spirit so as to be able to bear the burden of dealing with the people who could be so difficult. And two additional men are later added to the in the text which may explain the higher number appearing in Luke. So, either Luke is looking for evidence that in Jesus we can discern a critical link to Moses, an idea which seems to preoccupy him throughout the gospel, *or* he is emphasizing once

again the mission of the apostles to take God's Word *into the entire world* and not limit it to the people of Israel.

Rather than equipping his apostles for a kind of holy war against infidels, Jesus *de-equips* them of the requisite travel paraphernalia. They are not to carry a wallet, travel bag, or sandals. The absence of standard traveling equipment indicates the total dependence on the Sender. The instruction to "greet no one on the way" is a time-saving measure. The command to *greet householders with 'peace'* is not only adopting common Jewish practice, it characterizes the message of Jesus' good news.

It would have had special meaning for the people of the first century in that "the Roman Peace of *Pax Romana*, ushered in by the Roman Empire was a promise of peace through subjugation of lands. Roman armies traveled from place to place conquering smaller powers and ushering in protection and hopes for prosperity in exchange for tribute and obedience. The spoils of Roman armies brought material and cultural wealth to the Roman center while leaving the townspeople in the subject lands to pay the price." By contrast, in our gospel text this week Jesus instructs his followers to go from town to town to 'share in peace' with whatever household they enter. But what is this peace? It is *not* a peace won on the backs of commoners and soldiers.... not a peace reserved for the wealthy at the expense of the poor.... rather, it is a *peace of life*.

It fulfills the promise expressed in the infancy narrative which we find in the lovely words of Zechariah's canticle, "*his daylight has dawned from on high, bringing light to the dark (and) guiding our feet in the path of peace,*" and it anticipates the greeting issued by the resurrected Christ to the disciples: as Luke records it, "*he himself stood in the midst of them, and said, 'peace be with you.'*" In verses 12-15 which are omitted from our appointed passage (possibly because their references to judgment don't sit well with modern readers and listeners), Jesus says that for those who do not welcome his apostles, "*it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town*" because Sodom's proverbial wickedness arose from its having committed the sin of inhospitality, and not -- as we are often told -- because of sexual immorality. Table fellowship has a

prominent place in Luke's gospel. According to the narrative we find here, "sharing a meal defines hospitality...and the emphasis is upon being a gracious recipient. Jesus dines frequently, but he never gives a dinner party. He is always a guest. Even at the Passover meal at which he presides, someone else prepares it. In today's reading, Jesus instructs those sent forth to accept the hospitality of those who offer it, for as long as they offer it, *eating and drinking whatever they provide.*" This is standard etiquette for a guest in a hospitality context, but beyond that, "doing so is an act of table fellowship which 'seals the acceptance of the gospel by the household.'

Even if this model of hospitality offends us in some ways by comparison with our own values in the modern world (for example, we have a lower tolerance for those who appear to be *taking advantage of* our hospitality), "perhaps our generally accepted rules of hospitality (today) actually inhibit a practice that is more mutual."

"Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and he invites us to walk with him. His words here speak to every generation of Christian disciples and inspire a sense of urgency about bringing God's realm near." And it is worth considering why urgency seems to literally permeate this passage.

For one thing, Jesus will not pass this way again. If people don't respond, it may be too late. Jesus is "the last herald before the great debacle that will come on the nation if they don't pay attention." He knew all too well that most of his contemporaries didn't want to listen. The way he wanted them to follow simply wasn't a way that interested them. If at the heart of his message was peace, it wasn't peace that they wanted with their enemies like the Samaritans, and they feared and hated the peace represented by their Roman overlords. What they wanted was an all-out war, and a war of that kind with Rome was an invitation to national disaster.

For Jesus, fighting evil with evil was just like the Israelites in the wilderness complaining about their lot, ungrateful for their deliverance, and seeking to overthrow their current status with violence. No. For Jesus, the desire for peace came out of his knowledge and love of the God of Israel...as a God of generous grace and

astonishing, powerful, healing love.” To refuse a message based on this kind of love was to invite disaster, to literally throw themselves into the hands of a pagan, invasive power which would obliterate them. That’s what the urgency is about. And the war with Rome from c. 67-70 would demonstrate that truth for anyone who doubted the destructive power of an empire bent on establishing its claim to sovereignty.

Essential to understanding the seriousness with which Jesus uttered his commission to the 70 is the idea that now “we carry on (his) ministry,” a concept beautifully expressed by St. Teresa of Avila in the 16th century:

Christ has no body on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.

Amen.

{Sources Consulted: N.T. Wright, Luke for Everyone, SPCK, 2001; Amy L. Allen, “The Politics of Bringing Peace”, *Political Theology*, 2016; Scott Hoeszee, “Proper 9 C,” *Center for Excellence in Preaching*, 2016; Brian Stoffregen, “Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20,” *Exegetical Notes at Crossroads*, “Luke --- Proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom,” *Sunday 14C, Proper 9C*, www.lectionarystudies.com; Marilyn Salmon, “Commentary on Luke 10: 1-20,” www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=624; Mikeal Parsons, “Commentary on Luke 10:1-11, 16-20,” *Working Preacher* (id=2910); Michael Rogness, “*Commentary on Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20*,” Working Preacher (id=1721)}