

Sermon on Luke 10.1-9

Today we celebrate St Luke. Luke the author of one of the 4 gospels and also thought to be the author of the Book of Acts. Luke's voice is the largest contributor to the New Testament alongside Paul.

It was Luke's gospel that I studied for 2 years in school and during those formative years, unconsciously or not, he nurtured and shaped my understanding of the christian faith. It was Luke's words and stories that taught me about the importance of inclusivity and diversity being the bedrock for my christian way of life.

For Luke... getting out there and coming alongside and sharing life with people from all backgrounds and cultures, walking with the people who would normally not be included in the conversation, is what Luke is all about.

You could say that his writings have been woven into the very fabric of the democratic societies we live in to this day.

To some theologians frustrations, Luke is more interested in recounting stories with memorable images than he is in outlining exactly what we are supposed to believe. And to Luke I am grateful for that, because personally, I believe that our faith is a living faith that is fully experienced in the realities of life.

And that brings us to our readings for this morning.

While often we think about Jesus sending the disciples out into the world with the Great Commission in Matthew 28, our text from the gospel of Luke reveals another sending of the disciples.

On his way toward Jerusalem, Jesus sends out disciples to spread the good news to all the world. And did you catch the number? It's more than "the 12" we tend to cite. It's 70, and that number is significant.

It mirrors the number presented in the list of all nations in Genesis 10 alongside the story of the tower of Babel. It is a monumental moment in the gospel, furthering Luke's insistence on sharing stories that reveal God's desire for the gospel to truly be for all peoples and all nations, a theme that continues well into the book of Acts.

This is a story about what it means to be in community together.

But, before the disciples can race on their way, Jesus has some words of wisdom for them.

This is a pep talk which is unlike any other pep talk. Instead of giving an uplifting, inspiring speech Jesus lays out for them the difficulties they will face and more than that... they'll have to figure out their way without carrying much of anything with them.

An important theme in this passage and also in christian faith is hospitality.

If I was to ask you what is your understanding of the word hospitality, what would you say?

Maybe that it's about being a gracious and attentive host caring for the needs of our guests.

And yes all of that is true.

However this passage turns the church's concept of hospitality upside down.

It tells the church that what we need to do is not understand hospitality as our openness to the other.

That they can come into our space and we welcome them, but that true openness means entering into their space., learning to eat their foods, learning their customs, learning to live as they do.

And that's what the mission of God requires of us.

We need to listen to their stories and become one with them.

Ah but you might say...

Doesn't Jesus say to his disciples to beware of others who think differently to you?

'I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves'

It implies that 'the other' is dangerous and we need to beware of them.

When in fact for a lot of the Church's history, it's been the Church who too often has been the wolves.

We've been too ready to forcefully want to 'convert' peoples and unfortunately 'Our Way' has not been Christ's way.

Unfortunately we have gone out into the world with guns and swords and wealth and power.

Wanting whole communities, *nations even* to become like us.

To share *our* understanding of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The way that the current Church needs to experience hospitality is to be *really careful* about some of the 'us versus them' language we use.

It irks me when I hear christians talk about believers and non-believers, to talk about christians as being children of God as if non christians are not children of God.

Fellow human beings made in the image of the one God. Who's children are they then?

God calls us to enter into society with a gracious presence that's willing to be on the margins, willing to be not fully embraced but we are still willing to say

"look I've come here not to kind of create a new society but to contribute in any way i can to a society that's plenty diverse, that's plenty multi religious."

and not to insist on having the central place in society.

It calls for a degree of humility and vulnerability.

Maybe we think that the greatest gift Jesus gives his disciples is the ability to cast out demons, tread on scorpions or call down fire from heaven!

But maybe the bigger gift is the trust enough in God to rely on those around you. Jesus calls the disciples he sends out to be dependent.

Even when it may be a hostile environment.

It goes against the grain doesn't it to be dependent on others.

But that is when we learn the lessons of humility, vulnerability and thankfulness.

Over the last 7 months many of us have and will continue to learn how to be dependent on the care and generosity of others. Others who are very different to us, others who don't share our creed, our values but care enough to care for us. That is being Christ like and you don't need the label of christian attached to you.

Vulnerability and dependence on an 'others' grace and mercy and care will transform you.

It's no coincidence that it is in Luke's gospel where we hear the stories of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

This is the way of the vulnerable Messiah.

On Friday evening we heard on the news of the horrific attack in Paris on a teacher. We see the extreme consequences of this world insisting on a 'them and us' dialogue. It has to stop. Things have to change. The cycle has to be broken and it starts with all of us.

One of my favourite theologians is a lady called Barbara Brown Taylor. She is an Episcopal priest who left parish ministry to teach Religious Education in Piedmont College in.....

Her book 'Holy Envy- Finding God in the faith of others' is a must read.

It is not only her story about encounters with different faiths but also of a whole generation of young people who are growing up with more religious diversity than their parents and grandparents did and who are still trying to decide whether that is a good or a bad thing.

Where many people are saying that I am spiritual but not religious.

Here is a short extract from her book...

READ FROM PAGE 24 (bottom line) THROUGH THE ALL OF PAGE 25.

I pray that you too will also experience and embrace Holy Envy as God is revealed to us through the hospitality of our neighbour, whoever that may be...

Amen.