

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30; Galatians 6:1-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

In this world, there are events and people who change our lives in a positive way.

There is the story about a man, sceptical of missionaries, who visited the Fiji islands. He told the chief nobody believed what the Bible had to say, especially about Jesus either. He concluded by saying “People know better now, and you have been foolish to listen to it”.

The Fijian chief responded calmly, “Do you see that stone over there? We smashed the heads of our victims on it. Do you see that oven over there? We roasted human bodies in it for our great feasts. If it had not been for those good missionaries, the Bible and the love of Jesus Christ, which changed us from savages into God’s children, you would be roasting in the oven now!” The sceptic was never quite the same again.

The twelve apostles accompanied Jesus as He went around teaching from village to village, and they would never be the same again. In the Gospel reading for today, we hear of Jesus sending out seventy-two others to witness to everything they had seen and heard about Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

Jesus made three points that when He sent out His disciples. Firstly, they were to travel light. He wanted His disciples to be concerned about nothing else but the mission that He was sending them on. He didn’t want them to be weighed down by gathering together extra provisions and arranging transportation for all their belongings. Their task was to speak the Word of

God and to deal with bodily and physical illness of those they met, just as Jesus did.

Jesus is demonstrating the vital link between faith and action.

He is saying to them: “You aren’t being sent out to just tell people about faith in the living God, but you are being sent out to also show them what happens in their life when they really believe and trust. If you tell people about having faith in Jesus, about trusting God and then live a life that opposite to that, then you will hardly be believed”.

The situation hasn’t changed one bit for us today. Our actions can so easily deny our faith in Jesus. It is easy to confess our faith in Jesus one moment, and then deny that same faith by our unchristlike behavior in the next moment. By telling the seventy-two missionaries not to worry, but to trust in God, Jesus is telling them to, not just tell people about faith, but to let their listeners see in their lives what it means to trust God even for simple things like food and clothing.

Jesus then goes on to give them another instruction. “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town”. In other words, the disciples should not be burdened with accommodation arrangements. Jesus simply tells them to accept whatever is offered, and get on with the task He had given them of telling the Good News about Jesus. All this leads to an underlying point. The Gospel is shared within a relationship situation. The disciples were to stay for a while with the one family and in the one community. Get to know people. Be concerned about their cares and their needs. Jesus knew that for many people it takes a long time to understand the meaning and importance of the Gospel for their lives. And so the disciples are encouraged to, not only talk about the love of Jesus, but also be the love of Jesus in the community they were visiting.

The situation is no different today. We can imagine how effective our witness would be if we said, “God loves you, my friend, and wants you in His family, but I’m not interested in knowing that your mom died last week, or that you’re unemployed and really finding it hard, or that you are a stranger in the church and feeling pretty lost”. You know, as hard as we find it in ourselves to love some people, unless we do so, we will do nothing but hinder God’s work here in some way. Again Jesus is saying that along with the Gospel of love go actions of love.

As loving Christians we spend a lot of time listening to people’s problems and, hopefully being sympathetic to their situations.

Jesus encourages us to do this. But through our listening and speaking, the troubled person needs to hear from us, “Jesus loves you. He has provided the only cure for the sickness in our world. He died on a cross to give you forgiveness and the reassurance that even though you have messed up so badly, God still wants you to be His dearly loved child”.

That’s something we all need to hear again and again, especially when we admit that too often we have spoken loudly and boldly about faith in Jesus, only then to turn around and demonstrate how little we have let our Spirit-given faith change our lives.

And let’s not be fooled into thinking that our effort hardly makes a difference in the lives of others. When the seventy-two disciples returned and made their reports, Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning!” The seventy-two didn’t see anything like that, but, Jesus saw something they hadn’t.

When Jesus sends us out he intends to use us for something big. We look at our church, and we see mundane meetings, ordinary people, unspectacular routine, people with all kinds of troubles.

Yet Jesus sees heaven and earth being transformed through us. Jesus commissions us to be part of his revolutionary overthrow of the powers of death and evil. We can't always see it, because as humans we are caught up in the every day ordinary things of the church.

Yet in us, in our meetings, Sunday School classes, passing the offering plate, kneeling to speak to a child, visiting the sick and shut-ins, the reign of God is taking shape. He sends out ordinary people like us to be a signal, a witness that God's kingdom is breaking into the lives of people through us.

When we look at our congregation we see only ordinary people. Jesus looks at us, at our faith and witness and uses that faith and the witness we give in our daily lives, to bring His kingdom into the lives of others.

Let us pray today that God will continue to bless our going out in the name of the Lord.

AMEN.