

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

The Mission of the Seventy

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!” And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, “Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.”’

‘Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.’

The Return of the Seventy

The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’ He said to them, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’

Sermon – July 3, 2022 Pentecost 4

I would like to ask you a question. What do Christians and dolphins have in common?...They are both communicators. Dolphins live together in communities called pods. They communicate using a variety of clicks, whistles and other vocalizations. They even use ultrasonic sounds for [echolocation](#). Humans also communicate and live in communities. But Christians are special communicators. We are ‘out there’ people; people ‘sent out’ as our Lord sent out the 70 in pairs in this morning’s Gospel to share their good news that the Lord is near.

Our Lord said to the 70 he sent out...

‘...cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you...”’

Have any of you ever seen ‘Sister Act’ with Whoopi Goldberg? It’s not a new movie, but worth watching again. Whoopi Goldberg plays a night club singer who for protection is disguised as a nun so she can take refuge in a convent. She has witnessed a man killed by her gangster boyfriend’s thugs.

Disguised as Sister Mary Clarence, she somehow becomes the choir mistress and brings the choir along brilliantly; but the music is a quirky mix of traditional sacred and rhythm and blues from the Vegas night club scene.

The Reverend Mother is livid after hearing them sing in church! She hisses ‘This is not a theatre and this is not a casino.’

Sister Mary Clarence says:

But people **like** going to casinos and theatres. They **don’t like** coming to church because it’s a drag. We could ‘rock’ this place.

After the service the Monseigneur congratulates the Rev Mother for the innovative and inspiring music! He says he enjoyed church more than he had in a long time. Drawn by the music, people had walked right in from the streets of their depressed inner city neighbourhood.

The Reverend Mother is speechless.

At this point Sister Mary Clarence brings up another inspiration, another passion which she pretends is the Reverend Mother’s idea.

She announces they must go out into the neighbourhood and meet the people; step out into the depressed inner city streets around the convent to bring life and to spread some of the inner light they treasure!

The sisters seem to like the idea.

One sister suggests they might be able to help with the many problems out there.

‘That’s why we became nuns, isn’t it?’ she asks uncertainly.

Another sister says

‘There’s a lot more we can do for them than pray, Rev Mother.’

The Rev Mother is fearful.

‘Monseigneur, surely you realize how dangerous this neighbourhood is?’ His response ‘We’ll face that danger head on.’

Jesus said

‘Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.’

So out the sisters go, innocent as lambs midst the wolves...painting bright murals on the outside church walls, chatting to the prostitutes, serving hot soup, setting up a day care center, playing motor mechanic, skipping with the children, jiving with the girls...The neighbourhood is transformed and so are the sisters. The once empty church is filled and the offering plates overflow as the choir rocks with their soul music.

Our Lord said: **Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals;**...Our Lord didn’t...he set the example. You are enough when you are in Christ. You are empowered by the Holy Spirit. You will do more than you could ever ask or imagine! ‘You are not alone’ my Spiritual Director always said.

The pattern our Lord sets out for the disciples is that they travel as poor people, but, unlike the wandering Cynic teachers of the day, not even carrying a begging bag. Instead they came only with who they were, depending on local response. In larger Palestinian houses, you could enter the front half of the house from outside - it was public space. These disciples would then face the owners with a choice. Would the owners offer hospitality and be open to the healing and teaching, or would they turn away these uninvited would-be guests.

Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!” And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Offer the gift and blessing of peace. It will be received sometimes and sometimes it will not.

A while ago, I read about an English church in Nottingham that visited local pubs and offered regulars a free drink. They would sit down at a table and say, "Can we buy you a drink? We're just Christians from a local church wanting to show you a token of God's love, no strings attached. You don't have to talk to us. What would you like?" They would order a round of drinks, pay for them, and then move to another table making it clear there were no strings attached.

Sometimes that was all there was to it, but other times people would say, "Come back a minute. Why are you doing this? Who are you? Why would you buy us drinks?" And that would open the door to a discussion. The pastor claimed that the technique was highly successful, if controversial.

Perhaps most of us would find that form of "servant evangelism" a bit over the top — but it leaves the question hanging, "What sort of evangelism are you or we practicing that is better?"

We as Christians know something...we know something really cool and our Lord in today's Gospel is saying don't keep it to yourself...there is a harvest out there, a harvest of souls, of people ripe and ready to hear the good news; ripe and ready to be gathered in to the Lord.

A priest friend told me that in her last parish in Saint John, she went to the same Bistro for lunch every Friday for about 4 years. It became for her a kind of personal outreach. She gradually got to know the staff and some of the regulars. They formed relationships and shared things with her and even asked her advice. She embodied something to those she encountered, some who would never darken the door of a church or approach a minister or priest otherwise.

Our Lord said:

Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide,

The ancient world had strong customs about hospitality. Jesus' missioners used these. The result: you either welcomed these people or you turned them away. Enemies should not be offered hospitality, but were these enemies or friends? They claimed to be envoys of peace and wholeness, including healing. They claimed to be announcing the reign of God and by their actions, bringing its reality into life in the here and now. To receive them was to receive the one who sent them and to receive him was to receive God, and God's activity. To reject someone who is not an enemy, to refuse to offer hospitality, was shameful. It brought disgrace and promised misfortune. Reject these messengers and you reject Jesus; reject Jesus and you reject God; reject God and you invite judgment. Shaking dust off the feet is probably symbolic of such judgment.

Those sent entered the intimacy of peoples' homes. They sheltered there and ate together. They formed relationships and from this close proximity, healed and shared their stories.

Some call this relational evangelism or incarnational evangelism. In his book called 'Jesus for a New Generation', Kevin Ford, talks of "incarnational evangelism" He says "*We can't just come at people. We have to go with them.*" Jesus communicated his great love for us by becoming flesh in order to identify with us. Michael Frost calls the incarnation, Christ becoming flesh THE greatest miracle. In the same way, as we go out of our way to identify with those we encounter, both Christian and "pre-Christian" (Ford's term), they will feel loved. People are convinced of the reality of God's love not by rational arguments or one-time rallies but by a daily, consistent, practical demonstration that God's love is real.

Ford's - "*Jesus for a New Generation*" - says make the gospel practical, evangelism relational, tell stories rather than teaching abstract principles, and love them one by one.

Meet people where they are, love them and share who you are. Does that sound possible? We are Christians, called to be like the dolphins, using all our clicks and whistles to communicate God's desire for each one of us to come home. Amen.