

Sermon, Sunday 18 October 2020

Luke 10 v 1-9

Today, we celebrate Luke the evangelist. Luke was a doctor and Paul described him as the beloved physician. He might have helped Paul with his physical problems. Luke was a Gentile and of all the writers of the Gospels, he was the most educated and his books Luke and Acts are the best written.

He accompanied Paul on several of his missionary journeys. He tells of many things not found in the other Gospels, especially the famous parables of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the Pharisee and the publican and the story of the ten lepers. St Luke also shows how Jesus gave women a high place amongst his followers; only he gives the names of the women who accompanied him on his travels.

Amongst the Gospels he gives a special place to stories about the birth and childhood of Jesus. He believed he was energised by the Spirit of God. He experienced the Spirit coming upon the Christian community to unite them in a fellowship of Jews and Gentiles. The prime purpose of the coming of the Spirit upon the disciples was to equip them for mission. "The Lord appointed a further 72 and sent them ahead in pairs to every town and place he was going to visit himself".

They were sent out on an independent mission. Luke was an historian and he knew the importance of the mission to non-Jews in the subsequent history of the church. The number 72 was symbolic to the Jews. It was the number of the elders who were chosen to help Moses with the task of leading and directing the people in the wilderness. It was the number of the Sanhedrin, the supreme council of the Jews. It was also thought to be the number of all the nations of the world.

Luke was the man with a universalist view and it may well be that he was hoping for the day when every nation in the world would know, accept and love the Lord. Jesus' instructions to the disciples are important. They are not to be cluttered up with material things, they are to travel light. They are meant to concentrate on their task and not to greet people on the way; Oriental courtesies consume a lot of time!

There is need for more workers because of the demands of the harvest. The disciples bring a greeting which may or may not bring a response. In the case of a favourable welcome they may receive hospitality. If they do, they are to regard it as that which they deserve and as that with which they must be satisfied. When they enter a town they are to take what they are offered and preach the message of the kingdom. If they are not received they are to warn people by an acted parable, wiping the dust off their feet and claiming that the kingdom of God has come near. Those whom reject them have excluded themselves from the benefits and will come under judgement.

The mission includes healing the sick and proclaiming "The kingdom of God has come near." Luke in his two volume work is at great pains to maintain that the Spirit that equipped Jesus for his mission also equips his disciples to carry it on. God needs people who are available as instruments in his work. The instruments have to know that they are not alone; they are not doing their own thing but rather, they are doing God's work. Being chosen does not mean God likes one more than another or that some are better than others. Usually, they are quite flawed, or at least ordinary people, so it is clear the power is not their own. God's closeness is for the sake of communicating closeness to everybody else. You lead others to the depth you have been lead.

In Romans 11 Paul takes a whole chapter to point out that the Jewish people have been chosen once for all. The choice will never be withdrawn but that choice is for the sake of the Gentiles and the whole world. What at first seems exclusive is finally for the sake of inclusiveness. Here is the principle: you can only transform people to the degree you yourself have been transformed. You can only lead others as far as you yourself have gone. We proclaim God's

constant and gracious invitation to union with him. God flows out towards us, God chooses us before we ever choose back. To be witnesses on the mission we have to be aware of ourselves. Our ego inside is very strong. It is that part of ourselves which wants to be significant and important; it is defended and self-protected.

There is part of the self we don't want to see. Our tendency is to try to hide it or deny it, even from ourselves. Jesus, quoting Isaiah, describes it as "listening but not understanding, seeing but not perceiving". If we are defended we will deny or repress our shadow and project it elsewhere. We need to accept and recognise our shadow and like the 72, open our lives for the Spirit's use. The Spirit is like a stream running in our lives. It runs over rocks and the rocks are so important. As the water bubbles over them it receives oxygen and so energises and revitalises. We need the bumps in the road. We are in a dialogue with God.

Who initiates the dialogue? God starts the dialogue. God has spoken; God has sent his Word. It is not so much our dialogue with God. It is letting God dialogue with us. He encourages us to go into deeper waters, out of our depth, not to be afraid of it. We always want to be on solid ground but we need a process which encourages us to launch out. We need dialogue and discernment in a time of change. Our faith is not a monologue telling people how to live. It is about giving and receiving, interdependence. God is humble and relational. God does not remain remote. He is a God who is alongside. He doesn't use difference to isolate or power to dominate. God is open and doesn't cling to power.

We offer ourselves to God today, the God who shares our struggles.

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