

## Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

3/7/16

"Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves..."

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, to the glory of God the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

As I read through the Gospel this week in preparation for my sermon, I was immediately struck by the verse, "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves." This verse seemed particularly apt in the light of the recent anniversary of the Battle of the Somme that was remembered by both France and Britain this past week.

This battle, during the First World War, took place in France between the 1st and the 18th of July 1916. It was a battle fought by the French and British armies against the German Empire. It was by far the largest battle of the First World War on the Western Front and eventually more than one million men were wounded or killed, making it one of the bloodiest battles in human history.

This was a prime example of how the mechanization of war, through the development of the machine gun, now resulted in massive casualties on all sides. Part of the anniversary remembrance ceremony was the blowing of the whistles at exactly 07:30 am on the 1st of July. This chilling and haunting sound was the sign for thousands of men to climb out of the relative safety of the trenches and march directly into oncoming machine gun fire in the hope of gaining land from the German armies. In essence, the sound of the whistle was the call to die...

In today's Gospel reading we are not being called to our death like so many of those unfortunate soldiers, but we are being forewarned by Jesus that the task we take on as disciples of Christ has its own costs. You may recall last week that I preached on the Cost of the Cross, expanding on the idea that whilst salvation may be free, it certainly is not cheap.

It is interesting to note that the Gospel reading refers to "seventy" others. This is an important reminder to us that the New Testament is rooted in the history and symbolism of the Jewish Traditions. The number seventy was to the Jews a symbolic number. 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 also the number of the Sanhedrin, which was the supreme council of the

Jews. Lastly, the number seventy was also seen to be the number of nations in the world. Luke had an universalist view of the world and perhaps was thinking of the day when every nation around the world would know and love Jesus.

William Barclay, who authored a noted commentary on the Gospel of Luke, suggests that this passage tells us a few important things about both the preacher and the hearer.

I would suggest that for the sake of the message this morning, we equate the idea of the preacher and hearer with the concept of a Christian Disciple, which hopefully applies to all of us!

Firstly, the Gospel reminds us not to be cluttered up with material things. We are to travel light. It is so easy to be entangled and enmeshed in the things of this life. I am reminded of a brilliant article I read once that equated modern shopping malls as the new cathedrals of society... You only have to visit these shopping malls on a Sunday morning to find them bustling and many churches, sadly, rather empty. Society is driven by consumerism and materialism. It takes a strong spirit to remain simple in need and refusal of want.

Secondly, we are called as Christian Disciples to concentrate on our tasks. The Gospel of Luke suggests that the person of God must not turn aside or linger on the lesser things whilst the great things call us. This can be tricky sometimes. I am reminded of the intense training in the liturgy I received as a curate in the Anglo-Catholic Church. This beautiful, but intense and detailed liturgy, calls for focus and attention to detail. There were occasions that I became so embroiled in trying to be perfect that I lost focus of Jesus and even once or twice hurt myself as I tried too hard. My Rector at the time, a devoted Anglo-Catholic, would often remind me, " The liturgy is not meant to be life-threatening, Father!"

Thirdly, being a Christian Disciple is not about what we can get out of the ministry of Jesus, but rather what we can give to the people of God.

Unfortunately, there are many people today who operate under the license of the Gospel, but for their own gain. This is sad. This is not what the message of Jesus was about. People who misrepresent Jesus for personal gain will have to one day answer for their actions. Be wise. Be careful. Do not fall into the trap.

Fourthly, you and I have had the privilege of hearing the Gospel of Christ. What is our response to it? My response was to seek ordination in the Church of God

so that I could preside over the sacraments and preach the Gospel. I am not suggesting that you do the same, what I am suggesting is that you respond to the Gospel in the way that God is calling you to. This is enough. If you are doing the best you can to honour God in your life, then God will honour you. However, if God is calling you to action and you fail to respond, in whatever manner, then you are failing God and I would encourage you to relook at your personal spiritual convictions. It is never too late to honour God in your life in the way that He deserves, for ultimately, we serve a loving and forgiving God.

Lastly, Jesus calls us to be weary against pride and over-confidence. You see, our greatest glory is not what we have done but rather what God has done for us. I am reminded of the famous story about Sir James Simpson who discovered the use of chloroform as a pain reliever. When someone asked Sir James as to what his greatest discovery was, the questioner expected the answer to be about chloroform. Instead, Sir James replied with the following words, " My greatest discovery was when I discovered that Jesus Christ is my Saviour." Is Jesus still your greatest discovery in your life too?

The world around us can be a dangerous and dark place that can be overwhelming and frightening. Ask those twenty thousand men who died on that dark

July morning back in 1916. Our duty , as Christians, is to ensure to the best of our ability that events like this never ever happen again. We are called as Christians to heed the instructions of of our Lord, to make a difference in the world, be disciplined and to show love, all in the name of Jesus... All possible with the love and support of the Holy Spirit.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;  
Naked, come to thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

Are you ready to be held accountable for your response to the Gospels when Jesus calls your name one day?

May God bless you in the week ahead as you continue to reflect upon your response to the love of Jesus in your life.

Amen.