

Pentecost 7 – 9am & 10.30am Wesley – 7th July 2013

Readings: Galatians 6:1-10
Luke 10:1-11 & 16-20

Theme: “Being sent on the one hand but also caring for one another as Christ has cared and loved us.”

Two wonderful passages of Scripture are part of the Lectionary readings for this week. The Gospel from Luke 10 speaks of the sending of the seventy two (some manuscripts suggest the number was seventy in line with Hebrew Scripture numbers) but the formative part was they were sent in pairs on a mission to prepare the way for Jesus to come. Sometimes we overlook this fact that the role of this mission was to go before Jesus.

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.” Luke 10:1

The wording of ‘others’ probably is a reflection that Jesus had already sent out the twelve disciples in Luke 9:1 with a shorter instruction list than the seventy-two.

In Luke 10 Jesus also uses the analogy of harvesting in relation to the mission of the seventy-two.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Luke 10:2

Words that have inspired missionaries down through ‘the ages’ and still inspire people today. Gerhard Frost wrote the following poem – which I have changed a fraction, so apologies to Gerhard!

The Sent One

‘I remember being sent; it made me feel ten foot tall.

How dignifying to walk in borrowed presence down that winding road to the country store.

I carried a note, not in my handwriting of course, because I couldn’t yet write; but I could scribble.

I never scribbled on that note and I was careful, so careful lest it fall in the dirt.

I was content just to carry it.

To be sent is an exercise in being third.

First there is the sender;

second, the one to whom you’re sent; and then you, the sent one.

Any two without the other won’t do.

“The Lord appointed the seventy-two others,” the scriptures say,

“and he began to send them two by two ahead of him.”

He called them, he sent them, he charged them with a task.

What an honour to be carriers of his love!’

The sent ones. In a sense this is us today – we are all the sent ones on mission for Jesus. Our missional charge is given in Jesus’ final words in Acts 1:8 where Jesus says:

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Our ‘Jerusalem’ today is our own contemporary hometown culture of Canberra. The ‘sent ones’ are most effective in sharing the word when there is understanding of the expectations, values, norms and perspectives of each of the four or five generations in our society. For example, a baby boomer like me lives in a far different world than a Millennial or Generation Y individual. The implications for the gospel and church life in Australia are immense.

In a sense, in the Christian faith, we are losing this cross-generational communication of our faith with the census statistics telling us that those adhering to the Christian faith is decreasing quite rapidly.

Australia is still a Christian country with 61.1% saying they were Christian (down some 7% from the previous census). The next largest group of 22.3% declared 'no religion' and the third largest group of 9.4% did not answer the question. All other faiths made up only 7.2% of the Australian population.

With over 30% of Australians saying they have 'no religion' or not answering the question certainly adds to Jesus' words that we have a lot of work to do close to home both in sharing our faith and in finding appropriate ways to share our faith across the generations. What has worked in the past is not necessarily working right now.

Last week I shared in a training day with military chaplains as they looked at a plan called "The Australian Defence Force Spiritual Health and Wellbeing Strategy – fostering resilience, enabling restoration and promoting life". Certainly within the Australian Defence Force this area of spiritual health and wellbeing is being explored in a positive way with the support of the Chief of the ADF. The role of chaplaincy is in the main highly valued and respected and most of this is Christian based.

It made me think that 'as the sent ones' what are we doing in outreach and what could be our catch cry in a market place that loves a clear mission and vision.

I came up with eight words: Fostering faith....

Enabling hope.....

Growing life.....

in Christ.....

How do we see our mission? How do we do this or how can we do this better?

St Paul, in summing up his epistle to the church in the region of Galatia, helps us with his practical words in today's reading:

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

In the devotional booklet "With love to the World" it had delightful but simple words on this verse which I share with you. It said:

"Paul offered three criteria for this burden-bearing:

- use gentleness and affirmation
- 'set right' one who stumbles (rather than punish or censor)
- retain a humble awareness that each of us is on our own pilgrimage of faith.....

Today our neighbours' burdens are various and complex:

social, emotional, ethical, physical and economic for example.

Listening and learning from these neighbours forms connections requiring action and prayer." Just maybe in here we have some of the missional actions required as we step out in faith into a fast changing world that still has spiritual needs which Christ may fulfil through 'the sent ones' – you and me!

Prayer

Dear God,

Sometimes we don't know how to share our faith. We don't seem to have the right words at the right time and we are hesitant in our concern for others not knowing if our actions will be misconstrued as being too 'pushy' with our faith. Give us the grace and discernment to know when to speak and how to act towards others so that they may see the love of Christ revealed through us. May we also be sensitive to other people both in word and action so as to walk with others and help them carry their burdens of life.

Through Christ we pray. Amen.