



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York

The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, OBE, DD, *Rector*
John Scott, LVO, D. Mus., *Organist and Director of Music*
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, July 7, 2013

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

*Choral Eucharist
at 11am*

+

A Sermon by

The Reverend Victor Lee Austin, Ph.D.

on

Luke 10:1-11,16-20

+

TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT JESUS

It can be a discomfoting thought, that I am supposed to tell other people about Jesus. You know what I mean? And I don't mean I, Victor Austin, as a priest; I mean I, Victor Austin, as a baptized person. It's true for you too: you, if you are baptized, are supposed to tell other people about Jesus.

And the reason is that Jesus has laid that message upon us. Famously, he laid it upon the apostles at the time of his ascension. In his final words in Saint Matthew's Gospel, Jesus commissions them to go into the world and to teach all the people "to observe all that I have commanded you" [Mt. 28.20]. And it's not just apostles: upon many individuals Jesus laid the burden of proclamation. For instance, the demoniac out of whom a legion of devils departed at the word of Jesus (and went to their doom!)—that man, now clothed and in his right mind, was told by Jesus to go to his home and to "declare" to all the people there "how much God has done for you." The man, Luke says, "went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him" [Lk. 8.39].

Why is it uncomfortable for us to think of telling others about Jesus? Many reasons, I am sure. Part of it, if we are honest, is a bit of fear about our reputation. The people who tell other people about Jesus are often laughed at or mocked, and frankly we can see how they sometimes deserve it. Maybe they are shouting. Maybe they are insensitive. And sometimes, alas, they are corrupt. We don't want to shout, we don't want to be insensitive, and we really don't want to be a hypocrite.

But despite any discomfort we feel, it remains the case that every one of us is called to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus and that means using words. It is not a job that lies only with religious professionals: bishops, say, or priests, or hired hands of the congregation. It is a job for every follower of Jesus and it has been so from the beginning.

That is the great point of Luke's Gospel today: the account of Jesus sending out the 70 (or 72, the textual sources don't even agree on the number). Jesus didn't have only the 12 defined disciples, the special inner circle; he had wider groups of followers. Luke's special understanding is that these other followers, these more extensive groups, were also sent out by Jesus. No one else tells us this, save Luke, who thereby gets an important point, that everyone who follows Jesus also receives a commission from Jesus. That commission is to go out and spread the Gospel.

This, and not the specific instructions about staffs and bags and sandals, is the important point. The specific instructions just mean that when we venture forth God will provide for us whatever we need. So we needn't expend energy on, much less fret over, such things as where's the best place to stay and what will I do when my shoes wear out. Just go, Jesus says.

It is an amazing little passage, this section of Luke chapter 10, for we aren't told where these 70-odd people went. They went different places. But wherever they went, when they came back they were full of excitement. It actually worked! They are amazed. People listened to us. People were healed. Lives were changed. *It all worked out for the good.*

Of course it did, Jesus said. And the more we know about who Jesus really is, the more we will come to expect such powerful change. He, after all, is the one who saw Satan fall from heaven [Lk. 10.18]. And he is the one who sends demons to hell [cf. Lk. 8.33].

So what does it look like, to go out into the world with the Gospel? There is the saying, Preach the Gospel always, and sometimes use words. That's good advice, since it points out that our entire lives need to be proclamations of God's good work. But it is bad advice if it encourages our silence about Jesus. Although it is not enough just to talk talk talk about Jesus, we may need to use words more than we do.

There was a man in the emergency room. His friend, who had brought him there by taxi, was concerned: it had seemed that a heart attack might be in the works. But the tests came back negative, and the doctor was rather confident that what we had here was a case of anxiety. Medications were given, a follow-up appointment made, and the patient went home.

His friend, however, was troubled. Why? Because he had never offered to pray for him. His friend had thought of it, but was just a little too shy, or a little too bashful, to put the thought into actual words.

What might you say in such a case? Very simply, without any pretense or affectation, just simply ask a question. Could I say a prayer with you? And if the answer is yes, you might hold your friend's hand, or touch his arm, and say simple words, maybe like these: Lord Jesus, my friend here is not well. We don't know what is wrong, and we are somewhat afraid. Please heal my friend of his illness, whatever it is. And please be with us now.

Simple prayer: doesn't have to have a lot of words, doesn't need to be long. But it speaks the Gospel.

What else might it look like? In your home, if you have family or housemates, you might share things you learn about God. It is hard to bring up Jesus to those who are closest to us, because they see and know things about us that we don't expose to public view. But it is important to do so. So you might say: I was reading in the Bible, and do you know that story of the woman in the crowd who touched Jesus and was healed? Jesus turned to look for her. He was being touched by maybe a hundred people at once, and he turns to look for her. What do you think that's about? . . . You're just sharing from your heart something that struck you in the Bible. But you're risking that exposure to a friend or family member. You're taking the Gospel into that part of your life. With words.

What I'm trying to do today is to encourage you (and, to be honest, myself) to risk more in our lives of sharing the Gospel. And I think we have good reason for hope that, if we take some risks, God will bless our risking in ways beyond our imagining. Remember the surprise with which the 70 returned to Jesus. It had worked out better than they had imagined. Why?

There is a clue at the beginning of chapter 10. Luke says that Jesus sent out the 70 into the places that he was to go. That is to say, we never go alone anywhere. Jesus always goes with us. And in fact, Jesus is already there, ahead of us. So to speak the Gospel in our lives, to pray honestly with people we meet, to talk about Jesus from the heart with people we meet—whoever it is, wherever it is, Jesus is already there. That's why if we just take a little risk and share just a little bit, we'll find him all around us.

And that, friends, brothers, sisters—that is amazing.