



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
in the City of New York  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, July 7, 2019**  
*The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost*

*Choral Eucharist*  
*at 11:00 a.m.*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Ryan Bennett, *Assisting Priest*  
*on*  
Isaiah 66:10-14, Galatians 6:1-16, and Luke 10:1-11, 16-20  
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### **Cold Visiting as a Disciple**

Come Holy Spirit, giver of life and love. For our hallowing, give us words which pass into prayer, prayer which passes into love and love which is life with you forever. Amen.

*"I am sending you of to do some cold visiting"* – came the voice of my Rector from across the desk.

If you are curious to know what I mean by cold visiting, as was I as a slightly younger curate all those years ago. "Cold visiting" in Australia referred to the practice of taking hold of the parish roll, making note of all the people on the roll who weren't regular worshipers and going to knock on their front door on behalf of the church.

This was the end of a time, in fact, on reflection the time had already passed, (bar for a faithful few incumbents) where the centre of parish ministry lay in connecting with everyone across a parish with a direct approach.

This was still a time when most Australians still connected with a denomination regardless of being church attenders or not. Anglicans in Australia held the position then as being the church that people identified with even if they didn't have a church. The code among clergy for this group was, *I'm Cof E Vicar*, the fact that the Church of England in Australia became the Anglican church of Australia in 1981 seemed to pass them by....

Ultimately, "cold visiting" was designed to connect with the significant number of C of E's who still were listed on parish rolls across the country. Generally, people were polite, happy to say hello and thanked me for the visit and then closed the door and got on with their day. I think about this experience often when I hear today's passage being read. I pictured Jesus looking a bit like my Rector sitting on the other side of the desk, commissioning the disciples to go out for the next round of "cold visits".

What does Jesus mean by saying, *"I'm sending you like lambs into the midst of wolves?"* In the Mediterranean world of Jesus' day, to leave one's own community and enter another village where you were not known was a risky business. You weren't guaranteed a warm welcome and a pillow for the night, hence the significance of the disciples been sent out in pairs.

It's a missionary endeavour which is marked by no five-star treatment or added bonuses for the disciples. He's encouraging his disciples to be both cautious and street wise. Where welcome is offered, they're called to receive the welcome and hospitality of that home – "Peace" being the characterizing mark which connects the disciples to those who receive their message.

As we read the text we can picture how both excited and baffled the disciple's may have been. An information overload perhaps? Jesus giving detailed instructions on how to receive welcome and how to respond when not welcomed, based on the customs of the day. The underlining factor here for our consideration is this; the disciples are being equipped with all they need, spiritually and materially to complete this work – their message is this; *“The Kingdom of God has come near to you.”*

What comes to mind for you and me as we hear these words directed at us? Can we identify what the signs may be that God's Kingdom is ripe and alive among us?

Let me offer some ways in which we can identify with what I like to call “Kingdom Values”. Firstly, The Kingdom is alive in our midst through our capacity to be dependent on God and what God desires for us. The disciples are called to be responsive to what hospitality is offered and know this is *sufficient* to their needs. In being bearers of the word, they need to allow themselves to be ministered too. To know what is *sufficient* for us is freedom. Freedom to pursue what makes for a holiness of life. It is a mutual ministry marked by constant engagement. The healing ministry has the capacity to transform lives, restore human dignity and bind up broken wounds. Spiritually, materially we are called to make sure both individuals and faith communities have a sufficiency of spirit which drives us to be responsive to the needs of our own time.

The growing divide between rich and poor, the ongoing struggle for peoples of colour for equality as well as other marginalised groups along with a rise in populist movements across the world confront and challenge how the church can offer ministry with no partiality. Or perhaps the deeper question, do churches' plural offer ministry with no partiality?

But this is our call, this is a life.

We see the success of the endeavours in the life of the disciples, they're pleased at their level of success. Let's be honest, if we were in their shoes, we would feel the same. We need to remember that the communities the disciples engaged with had a strong sense of the “spirit” world, with hierarchies in this world of spirits and demons and long held beliefs of how they engaged with this world in their day to day lives.

To understand this important fact helps us interpret Jesus' use of language, images and visions was very common during this time. Underneath this strong language lies this message for the disciples and us; don't rest in the sense of achievement as our own. The danger here is that we allow ourselves to be defined by our achievement and forget that this is ultimately God at work, through us. Paul model himself for us in Galatians as being identified by his servant hood to the crucified and risen Lord.

This missionary work takes many forms. It's a vocation for lay and ordained people alike.

For the church of today and tomorrow we need to be a vocational people who look to seek to be equipped with what is sufficient for ministry. As the church is changing and as mainstream denominations across the western world are experiencing a level of decline, it's easy to feel depleted and drained, feeling that we have to recreate the wheel to keep the ship on course.

What if this time is providing us with a hidden gift? We need to remember at that God is still God come what may. We may be being called to see new horizons which perhaps aren't yet clear to us? For me, there is something exciting about this time. Let's trust as we're being led and as were being sent to be the messengers for today and tomorrow. Our esteemed choral and liturgical life at St. Thomas will mark much of what we do and who we are in this place. Shinning lights which will continue to sustain us throughout this time. Jesus said to his disciples, remember this, “Your names are written in the book of life.”