

Sow to the Spirit
A Sermon preached on July 4, 2010
by
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at Knox United Church, Parksville BC

Holy One,

Make us agents of your transforming power
and heralds of your reign of justice and peace,
that all may share in the healing Christ brings.

And may the words of my mouth and the meditations,
of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight.

Amen.

If I were to ask for seventy of you to volunteer,
to head out into the neighbourhood, sharing God's love and abiding hope....

I wonder how many of you would rush up here to the front???
I wonder??

Jesus sent out seventy... in pairs,
to every town that he planned to visit.

As a part of my recent time of Study and Contemplation,
I visited a Franciscan Retreat Centre in Cochran Alberta.

When I called to inquire about space for my retreat,
they asked if I expected to hold silence for the time I was there.

It was not my plan, and at the time I did not ask why they needed to know,
but on arrival, I learned that on my second day there, 70 grade eight students,
from a Calgary Catholic School, would be arriving after breakfast
to spend the day on the grounds of the centre.

The person who came to speak with me after supper the night before the arrival of
the '70'....
did so with a hesitating nature, an apologetic tone in his voice,
watching me carefully for a reaction.

Contrary to what he seemed to expect,
I was delighted... imagining the large rolling field overlooking Cochran, filled with
youth who would undoubtedly bring energy, laughter, and curiosity with them.

Last week we heard about Jesus sending messengers ahead of him into a Samaritan town which rejected him (9:52-53).

And now 10 verses later Jesus again, sends out people into every town and place he was going to visit (10:1).

Luke links this tradition to the great journey to Jerusalem.

Yet it is not really about preparing people for the visit of Jesus, but rather about the mission of the disciples.

It is very likely that Jesus instructed his disciples to follow his own pattern of activity. And what did Jesus do.... he traveled from town to town, from place to place, to be where the people were.

He would come to a town or settlement, then would need to find a place to sleep and be looked after. Larger Palestinian houses were such that you could freely enter the front half of the house from outside - it was public space.

The disciples, once greeted, would then invite the owners to be a part of the kingdom movement.. The people would choose to offer hospitality, enjoying what that meant to have guests...

....remember the disciples brought teachings, words of hope, healing....

Or would the home owners turn the disciples away, saying no thank you, making a choice not to offer hospitality? The disciples were, remember, uninvited guests.

The ancient world had strong customs about hospitality. Jesus knew this. He was suggesting a visit would be quite confronting, people were forced, really, to make a choice.

It was accepted that enemies should not be offered hospitality, but were these enemies or friends? They claimed to be messengers of peace and wholeness, including healing. They claimed to be announcing the reign of God .

To receive them was to receive the one who sent them, and to receive him was to receive God, and to be open to the kingdom.

To reject someone who is not an enemy, to refuse to offer hospitality, was shameful. It brought disgrace and promised misfortune. That is the expectation here, too. Jesus knew this.

Reject these messengers and you reject Jesus; reject Jesus and you reject God; reject God and you invite judgement. Shaking dust off the feet is probably symbolic of such judgement.

The action plan of the disciples and doubtless of Jesus himself, made hospitality central, especially the shared meal. The response of faith, was about willingness to share food, to be together in mutual acceptance and fellowship at a meal.

This was also a central symbol of hope. In their radical way Jesus and his disciples after him were setting the stage for the hope we share, when we gather around the table here. Gathering with strangers became celebrations of hope, but also of inclusion, and healing.

As I watched the 70 youth pour out of two school buses, on the grounds of the Mount St. Francis Retreat Centre, I wondered if that was how the early disciples acted as the set out two by two.

There was much chatter, some pointing and exclamations of awe at the city of Cochran spread out before them.

Some ran to the edge of the bank that led to the stream below, teachers yelling words of caution.

I later watched as the youth dispersed... paper in hand, to make rubbings of the various etchings on monuments and statues.

Some were thoughtful, some a flurry of arms and legs, and action,
Some hesitant, and a few eager to wander into places
that clearly they had been instructed to stay away from.

Every group that I encountered offered a smile,
or responded to my 'hello', even if they were surprised to see me.

I wondered if they were 'in training'....
I wondered if they felt like the ones being welcomed,
or the ones learning how to welcome others?

When the '70' return to Jesus, they are full of their stories of success.
Using an apocalyptic imagery, Jesus shifts their focus.

It is not so much about whether their names are 'in the book'...
but rather Jesus points to the close relationship with God,
that comes from living and moving in the realm of Spirit.

Not every visit to a household was successful,
yet God's love and acceptance remains beyond failures,
especially during the times when life is hard.

Whether or not the disciples were welcomed,
or turned away....
they were to tell the people
"the kingdom of God has come near."

Hope is in the connection with the Holy,
not so much in what we do... rather.... it is 'to whom we belong'... that names us.

Our acceptance by God... God's love for us is unconditional...
And we are to share that amazing knowledge with all whom we meet.

We do not head out the doors two by two, inviting ourselves into peoples homes.
this in not our culture...but we do find ourselves in the company of
neighbours and friends in this community.

It is not always easy to talk about who you are... in relationship to God,
but where ever you wander...
you make the statement that 'God has come near'

Paul's instructions to the Galatians.
reminds us that we reap what we sow.... so...sow to the Spirit.

Sow hospitality, share hope as you gather with others for a meal,
build up each other, sharing burdens and joys.

Feel the stirrings of compassion, feel the Spirit shape justice...
be held in the hand of God, and fly free in God's love.

The kin-dom of God is near...
thanks be to God.

And may it be so. AMEN

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