

Year C (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost) Proper 14 Luke 10 vv1 to 11, 16 to 20

Although we are just beginning July, I'm going to begin by talking about Halloween – in particular, a characteristic that is becoming more and more common and is indicative of our society's thinking in general. Now, I don't know about you but, when I was young and heading out to trick-or-trick in my costume of choice for that year, I went up and down a few streets in my neighbourhood – going to every house except for the ones in darkness. If there was no welcoming front door light, I moved on to the next house. Apparently, these days, a front door light is just not good enough – unless it's orange or maybe an eerie purple. Even then, the house stands in question. Increasingly, if a house is not proudly displaying a multitude of store-bought décor specifically geared to Halloween then that house quite likely will be passed by in favour of a house that is. I watched my own undecorated house being passed over when I first moved to the Soo and promptly went out to buy Halloween decorations for the next year. Not only is this a testament to the winning power of consumerism, it is also an indication of our inclination to pre-judge. My house was most definitely being judged by its outside appearance and was being found lacking by the children – and clearly, too, by the adults accompanying them. The super-decorated houses must have the best candy and houses like mine surely would have substandard treats or maybe none at all. This is just one example of how many in our society often “judge a book by its cover” so to speak.

In today's Gospel story we see a message that is offered, free of judgement, to everyone. Jesus sends out the seventy disciples with a very simple proclamation for them to announce: Peace. “Peace to this house” is what they are to say. There

is no assessment before making this proclamation. He doesn't ask them to determine whether this house follows the God of Abraham, or whether this house has kept the law, or whether this house is likely to receive the good news Jesus brings. Jesus doesn't ask them to do a risk assessment or pre-judge whether this house will be worth their time. No judgement...just peace.

This peace that the disciples are to proclaim is the Hebrew word "Shalom." In Jewish contexts, this word expresses wellbeing and restoration. The next bit is crucial. Jesus instructs them, that if anyone in the house shares in their peace, then their peace will rest on that person. Not only are the disciples to nonjudgmentally go to the first house they come across, if there is even one person in that household who is open to receiving God's peace, they are to stay there.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke describes peace in terms of God's arriving kingdom. Complete wellbeing and restoration of true peace is only found within God's kingdom. Those who welcome the peace of God are welcoming God's kingdom and therefore the salvation that goes along with that. If no one in the house is open to receiving the salvation of the kingdom then God's peace will find no where to take hold.

Jesus tells the disciples to accept the hospitality offered to them – eat whatever is set before you, he says, for the worker deserves to be paid. It is appropriate for the people welcoming the salvation of God's kingdom to care for the needs of those bringing it to them. Jesus says a second time, eat what is set before you, this time with no reason attached. This could indicate the inclusive nature of their

mission, going among people who do not follow the same dietary restrictions as the Jewish people.

So... we have learned that Jesus and his disciples are extending God's salvation to everyone they come across. This inclusivity was actually big news in those days. Every country, even every locality, had their own god or gods and they all stuck to their own individual territory. The God of the Jewish people was different. This God was claiming sovereignty over the entire creation and all that is in it. Despite the fact that we know this with our heads, our hearts sometimes have trouble catching up to that knowledge. We name God as Lord and King yet forget that we live in his kingdom. We think of his kingdom as somewhere else, this mysterious "heaven" or "paradise" we will see when we die. But God's kingdom is here. We live in God's kingdom. And, despite the inclusive message we hear in many of our Gospel stories, we struggle with this characteristic of God's kingdom. Many Christians still believe they have the market cornered on God's salvation and think there are certain groups of people who are not going to be allowed in.

The only prerequisite to receiving God's peace is, today, incredibly clear. Jesus says, "if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person." This inclusivity makes for a plentiful harvest indeed. Harvest is what Jesus names those people waiting to hear his good news. He says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." This should be the go-to, inspirational verse of hope and comfort for every churchgoer who has ever said, "We're getting too old and there are too few of us." Don't feel badly if you have said this or something similar. It's incredibly common. But hear what Jesus is saying today – really hear it and absorb

it. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. This is NOT followed by, “therefore ask the Lord of the harvest for more laborers.” Jesus tells us to ask God to send out the laborers that exist already. Just get out there into the harvest – God’s work will be accomplished with us, his laborers. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few so ask God to help you get out there and get harvesting.

What are we supposed to do when we go out into the harvest? Jesus tells us we are to share God’s peace which means sharing God’s salvation and that means telling people the good news that God’s kingdom is here. We profess our hope together when we say, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” And this is important hope for us to hold on to: Jesus has saved us and, when he comes again, so, too, will come the final perfecting of God’s kingdom. But, this is not the good that Jesus came to proclaim when his two feet walked this earth and it is not the good news that Jesus tells us, his disciples to proclaim. We are to tell the world that God’s kingdom is here. This is why there is such a sense of urgency in Jesus’ instructions: Leave now with only what you have with you and don’t stop to talk to people on your way. The kingdom is here – now – you must let people know, Jesus says. This is a task laid on every single one of us and every single one of us, in carrying out this task, will hasten the full arrival of God’s kingdom.

Jesus instructs his disciples to cure all the sick of any town that welcomes them and tell them that God’s kingdom is near to them. Curing the sick and the nearness of God’s kingdom are linked together by Luke. In the perfection of God’s kingdom there is no sickness so restoring people to health is a glimpse of the perfection to come. The disciples are sent out to reveal God’s kingdom in its coming perfection. We are to do this as well. God’s kingdom is here, perfection

awaits, but by proclaiming its nearness through words and deeds, we reveal glimpses of this perfection in every word and action that brings God's peace – the wellbeing and restoration of shalom: Kind words to someone who needs to hear them, rides to the hospital, contributions to St. Vincent Place, building relationship over coffee and goodies, and so on.

This means, too, getting rid of words and actions that are not a part of our ministry of reconciliation: anything hurtful and divisive, anything that shuts out rather than welcomes in. We live in God's kingdom and those things do not belong here. It doesn't mean our task is easy. We are lambs among wolves Jesus tells us. There will be resistance to our good news of the kingdom, resistance that sometimes even comes from within ourselves. Shake the dust off your sandals when you leave people who have not welcomed you, Jesus says. Sometimes we will need to shake the dust off our own hearts and minds.

This saying, "shake the dust off your sandals" sounds like it might mean "have nothing more to do with those people, ignore them, they've made their decision." It actually comes from the ancient Jewish custom of shaking foreign soil off of the bottom of their sandals before setting foot back in Israel. It was the removal of the soil of the realm of foreign gods before re-entering God's realm, because, as I mentioned earlier, it was thought that the various gods were limited to their own country's territory. So shaking the dust off your shoes for the disciples then and for us now is a way of acknowledging that we are leaving behind the realm of the world and re-entering the realm of God's kingdom. We constantly must shake off the world's influence on us – the thinking of empire that values property,

pocketbook, and prestige and creates social classes and chasms between rich and poor.

Shake the dust off your sandals does not mean that we never give people a second chance. Our God is a God of second and third, and fourth chances. Jesus tells us today to remember that, despite the closed hearts and minds we may encounter, despite our own failings at times, even as we shake the dust off our sandals we are to say, "God's kingdom is here." God's kingdom is unstoppable. We are being drawn toward its perfection. We can be a part of that work of revealing the perfection of the kingdom or not.

The year was 1678 and the setting was the City of London. Work on what was to become St. Paul's Cathedral was still in its early stages and, unknown to the workforce, the building's brilliant designer, Christopher Wren, was visiting the site. He moved among the throng of industrious stone cutters, engineers and carpenters, casting a careful eye over proceedings and enquiring about the activities of various workers. One mason, asked about the task at hand, replied, 'I'm cutting this block of stone'. Coming to another craftsman, apparently engaged in a similar activity, Wren enquired again. This time the answer was different: 'I'm trying to put some bread on the table for my family'. The incognito architect continued his tour and asked the same question of a third worker, 'What are you doing?' He too was cutting and shaping a hefty slab of Portland limestone. With a glint in his eye, the worker straightened his back and exclaimed, 'I'm building a great cathedral for my God.' (story from *Rewilding the Church* by Steve Aisthorpe, p.134).

Today, Jesus' disciples are transformed from eagerly listening, learning students into leaders who actively reveal and proclaim his kingdom. This is the exact same thing that we undergo each week. Through prayer and praise and participation in all aspects of our worship, we are transformed in the presence of God and then we are sent out to continue this transformation and to transform the world. "We are commissioned to participate in the most momentous enterprise ever, a scheme of ultimate significance and eternal consequence" (Aisthorpe, p.134). Despite some resistance, the mission of the 70 was an overall, huge success. They returned jubilantly to Jesus and his response to their success was to remind them of the cosmic significance of their actions. "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning," he tells them.

God's salvation includes us as individuals but it is not *all* about us as individuals. If we think we need only worry about our own salvation then, when we stand before God, as Desi said to Lucy, we will have some explaining to do. We are sent to reveal God's kingdom, to build the body of Christ. Each stone we hew and shape, big or small, is important in the building of God's great cathedral. We are the living stones of God's kingdom and we are sent to form more. The harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few. Let us ask God to send us out into his harvest.