

“A Word of Peace and Works of Healing”

Luke 10:1-24 After this the Lord appointed seventy¹ others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'¹² I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town. ¹³ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. ¹⁶ "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me." ¹⁷ The seventy¹ returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" ¹⁸ He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹ See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." ²¹ At that same hour Jesus¹ rejoiced in the Holy Spirit² and said, "I thank³ you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.⁴ ²² All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." ²³ Then turning to the disciples, Jesus¹ said to them privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! ²⁴ For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

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If you were to ask me to put my head in a noose professionally, I would probably do it by saying the church today needs a corrective as to what it is proclaiming as the Gospel. We have truncated the Gospel that Jesus himself and the early church proclaimed, that Gospel being the proclamation that God has and is saving the entirety of his creation in, through, and as Jesus Christ who was God the Son become human, lived, died, and was raised and ascended to the Father as Lord of all creation they have poured themselves and their power to

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reign upon us in the gift of the Holy Spirit, the power which is the bond of love that holds Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in union. We have truncated this Good News of God's Creation healing gift of himself to something that is concerned simply with *me* and *my sin* and *my fears about death*. It followed the basic format that God loves you and sent his Son to die for you because your sin has cut you off from him and eternal life in heaven. You just need to believe that God did that, confess you are a sinner, and invite Jesus into your heart and you won't have to fear dying, and...maybe...you'll get to have a born again experience.

If you are a serious student of the Bible and actually read the thing you will notice that the Gospel that's in the Bible, that Jesus himself and the early church proclaimed is quite different from the truncation we are accustomed to. Luke here gives us a glimpse. The Gospel they proclaimed was that the Kingdom of God, the Reign of God, has come upon us in, through, with, and as Christ Jesus and is coming fully very soon. Basically, as it is in heaven so shall it be on earth by this Jesus. The reality of this coming of the Reign of God was demonstrated with works of power as Luke says: a word of peace and works of healing, and even the expulsion of the demonic. The content of this Gospel augmented a bit after Jesus death, resurrection and ascension to include the proclamation that even sin and death has been defeated and that all things are being made new in Christ Jesus by the gift of the Holy Spirit to us and will be finally put to rights when Jesus returns and there is finally a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth where God's reign is not hindered by sin and death.

The Kingdom, the Reign of God is everywhere that Jesus and his authority are present; Jesus and the loving communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit given to us in the gift of the Holy Spirit. To us today this means that the personal presence of Christ Jesus is here with us in our fellowship through the Holy Spirit so that we share in his relationship with God the Father as his brothers and sisters and co-inheritors of the Kingdom. The King and the Kingdom are with us. We have some good news to offer that is very real that goes beyond saying “you've got a little sin problem that you need to take care of so that you don't die and go to hell. Here's the answer.” We have a real community of faith in which Jesus himself is present; Jesus, the one whom God raised from the dead, the one who sits at the right hand of God and rules the cosmos. We have been granted the authority to extend his peace (the loving communion in God) to this community, to bring real healing to the difficult and indeed crippling situations of life, and even to dispel evil because we've got the Truth. By the gift of his Holy Spirit and by his own Word Jesus Christ has given this authority to us and the power to make evident the good news that his kingdom has come to Caledon. Caledon can listen and accept this Good News or reject it. He has given us the authority to bless with a word of peace, to bring healing, even to cast out evil.

Having said all that I think there is a deeper question we need to ask of ourselves and maybe even of God: “Are we truly offering this community the Good News of the Kingdom of God with us now and coming fully at the end of time through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit or is it some other Gospel or maybe even no Gospel at all?” Before I left West Virginia at the last Presbytery meeting I attended, I listened as the chair of the budget and finance

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committee of the Presbytery announced that the money just wasn't there to carry out the current operations of the Presbytery. The provision that God promises along the way for his disciples to live on while they proclaim the Good News wasn't coming in. They needed to scale back. That meant paid staff and the support of certain outreach ministries in the Presbytery were going to have to go. The chair of the Budget and Finance Committee offered the blunt observation that evangelism or rather the lack there of was the true culprit. With the exception of a few anomalous congregations the same observation holds true for the Presbyterian Church in Canada. We are losing more than we are taking in, death being the primary reason. It should certainly tell us something if those coming to Christ can't keep up with those going to be with Christ.

I would push the observation of my friend down in WV a bit further. He is correct to say that Evangelism or the lack there of is the true culprit, but we have to ask why? Why are we so reluctant about spreading the very real Good News of the Kingdom of God come and coming in Christ Jesus? That's the real question. Maybe we're afraid that God won't keep his end of the bargain. If that is the case then lack of faith is the true issue. As faith is what arises when the faithfulness of God meets human fidelity, our ability to trust and be faithful, and the ultimate proof of God's faithfulness to us is his presence with us, maybe it is that our churches suffer from not knowing that Jesus is really with us as he promised to be even unto the end of the age. Creating faith is God's work. It is not something we can do on our own. But we can certainly pray “Lord I believe, help my unbelief.” We can ask God to let us know him more deeply.

Another huge part of the problem is that we have a certain set of eyeglasses through which we see the church and those eyeglasses keep us from having a vision of the Kingdom. Its time we got a new prescription. We have our idea about what church ought to be and we're a bit reluctant to think and to look outside of that box and catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God as it is truly in our midst as the presence of Jesus Christ. We look at the church and say Worship done according to this order, Sunday School, Youth Group, picnics, fellowship hour after worship, Bible Study, Session and Committee meetings, being there for each other, and occasionally doing something to help the poor. I look at the New Testament and it says the Kingdom is peace, real healing, the casting out of evil, and a fellowship built on serving one another in love. I hope you're beginning to see the contrast. We have our way of doing things and call it church. Jesus has his way of doing things and calls it the Kingdom of God. I think we are very committed to the church, and we feel secure in that familiarity. But shouldn't we rather be committed to Christ and his Kingdom and accept the vulnerability of being lambs among wolves and start proclaiming him and his kingdom?

Our task is to go forth and proclaim the Kingdom, the Reign of God in Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ, the reign of God here on earth as it is in heaven; and to do this until he comes. Jesus said to first ask the Lord of the Harvest to send forth harvesters and then those whom the Lord sends forth are to go. As we have all been given the Holy Spirit and thus a share in Christ's authority we must all go. We do not go forth saying, “Do you

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know you're a sinner and you're going to hell if you do not accept Christ?" No! We go forth with a word of peace. We go forth saying, "The peace of Christ be with you." I do not know of anyone who does not need the peace that comes from knowing that in Christ it is on earth as it is in heaven, that God is putting things to rights. The amazing thing is that when we give this blessing of peace it is not an empty blessing. The Kingdom of Christ's peace is present in it. Jesus next told his disciples to cure the sick that are there. The New Testament word for cure there doesn't mean just healing a sick person. It is restoring them to meaningful life. We have been given the power to restore people to meaningful life. This is one reason I go and play music in nursing homes. When you've seen otherwise vegetative people begin to tap a toe you've seen a small glimpse of the Kingdom where Jesus reigns. You've seen it become on earth as it is in heaven. Blessed are you eyes. We have been given the amazing gift of Jesus' own authority and power to speak the Word of peace and to do works of healing. If that doesn't blow your mind I don't know what will. But it is the truth and let us go forth in it. Amen.