

Grace, Mercy and Peace to you all from Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!

Remember last week in our gospel text, Jesus pointed out our tendency to put all kinds of stipulations in place before we feel secure to go out and witness to what we know about God and to how we have experienced God's love.

(Like to bury the dead loved one once they are dead and I will follow you Jesus or Let me say goodbye to folks at home first and I will follow you) in short we buy some more times before we commit ourselves to follow Jesus.

This week, the text is about a list of things we think we *need to have* along before accepting the mission. That is why Jesus directed the disciples, this time not only the twelve that we know, but seventy disciples. Jesus sent them two by two so that they were not alone. I will come back to that but first, let me remind us again as from last week that Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. Yes, we will dwell on that until after the Reformation Sunday. Jesus is on the way!

We, Christians, disciples of Jesus, are people on the way too but we don't chart that road ahead of time. Instead, we try to walk daily by faith...

Let's look again at the instructions Jesus gives to the seventy missionaries. They are to enter a town, and where welcomed they are to stay. That is a model of a Christian hospitality, accepting to stay and for the host to welcome a stranger.... They are to eat what is given to them. That is a table fellowship. Then, they are to cure the sick which is the compassion and care. And finally, they are to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near. Do you notice the sequence? Be there where people are. Live with them. Eat with them. Help them out in any ways and then tell and share with them about God's kingdom.

We can conclude that Kingdom of God is near when **we are faithful in serving and doing ministry first**, not the other way around like a group of two people knocking door-to-door to do mission without doing anything else. That was not Jesus instructed his disciples.

The theme of the sermon today is about doing ministry together. It is a team work. No one was going to do God's work alone. Jesus is teaching his disciples already this early on in his ministry the importance of the reliance on each other, especially in his absence. We don't just do this alone. We do this as a community. That is one reason why we come to church on Sundays. Because, we know that this is our group, like the group of seventy. They are not in this alone. They don't just have a few fellow apostles, but seventy. We come to church to be reminded that we are not alone.

Trinity members, the nature of our faith is radically communal. Even if we hear too often nowadays some of the claims about faith and spirituality as being isolationist and independent -- "my own faith, my own religious system, even my own God." May be, you have heard about **Sheilaism** or not but it is a shorthand term for an individual's system of religious belief which co-opts strands of multiple religions chosen by the individual usually without much theological consideration, according to the Wikipedia. The term derives from a woman named Sheila

Larson, who is quoted by Robert Bellah and Richard Madsen in their book *Habits of the Heart* as following her own "little voice" in a faith she calls "Sheilaism".¹

In Chapter 9 of their 1985 book *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah and Madsen discuss how religion in America has moved from being highly public and unified, as it was in colonial New England, to extremely private and diverse. To demonstrate the shift, they quote a young nurse, to whom they gave the name Sheila Larson:

"I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice...It's just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other."

Bellah and Madsen suggest that Sheilaism is "a perfectly natural expression of current American religious life"².

But here is the thing; Jesus reminds us today the importance of our togetherness. That is why Jesus sent the seventy disciples out in pairs. Because when one weakens, the other can help. When one is lost, the other can seek the way. When one is discouraged, the other can hold faith for both for a while. That's what the company of believers does – we hold on to each other, we console each other; we encourage and we inspire each other; and even we believe for each other.

This is the great gift that Jesus is giving us to do God's work in teamwork and to trust and to observe. Because when we work together, when we recall that God said it is not good for us to be alone, when we see our hope and welfare as inseparably linked to that of those around us, then we not only can accomplish so much more than we possibly could alone, but we also discover that our names, along with those first disciples, are written in the book of heaven.

I invite us to do God's work together. We are invited to share the message by **welcoming others, sharing bread** with the hungry, and **offering compassion to the afflicted**. Our baptism also reminds us that God has first come near to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The promise that God is near in Christ compels us to live faithfully and compassionately, wherever our journeys take us.

As Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) quoted," *Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks Compassion on this world, Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*" Amen

¹ Bellah, Robert, and Richard Madsen. 1996. *Habits of the Heart*, [University of California Press](#). ISBN 0-520-20568-5. p. 221.

² Bellah & Madsen. p. 221