

Sermon for July 4th 2010 Luke 10

In the gospel lesson that we just heard, the instructions Jesus gave to his seventy messengers were remarkably specific and left little doubt that their task would be difficult. Saying that he was sending them out like lambs into the midst of wolves, he encouraged them to take only what they were wearing and to carry nothing with them.

They were to go provisionless, honoring their absolute trust that God would supply all that they needed. They were to be consumed by the urgency of their assigned task allowing no distractions from the main intent of their visit. They were to stay in one house and they were not to trouble themselves about orthodox matters of eating and drinking, but to take whatever was offered them. Their work was to offer peace, cure the sick, and share the news that the kingdom of God was near. This would alert the truly devoted persons but would infuriate others. Against the latter the disciples were instructed to shake the dust off their feet.

So off the seventy go and upon returning they report back to Jesus. What they have to relate is so extraordinary they can hardly restrain themselves. They are ecstatic at the control they exercised – that even the demons listened to them.

And Jesus responds to the puffed up disciples by saying: Oh Yes, you have been given the authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and power over the enemy, but do not rejoice in your own success – rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Rejoice because you belong to God.

Last week, David asked you all a question. He asked you the question “what are you”, not “who are you” but what are you. Today I am going to ask you a question also – again, it is not “who are you” but whose are you? On this fourth of July in the year 2010 I want to ask you to whom do you pledge your allegiance? To whom do you belong?

Independence Day is indeed a very important day in our country. We commemorate the adoption of the declaration of independence, declaring our independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain, but I must say to some extent I believe we have gotten away from what our forefathers thought about what it means to celebrate this day.

Let us go back to July of 1776 and look at how John Adams expressed his idea of celebrating this day – Adams wrote a letter to his wife Abigail that said this: “this day will be the most memorable epoch in this history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty.”

Adams goes on to say that these acts of devotion should be in the form of celebration with pomp and parade and games and illuminations from one end of the continent to the other but he makes the point that these celebratory acts are acts of devotion to God.

Today our society is sending us messages about who to pledge our allegiance to that are not in always in sync with how we are called to live our lives as allegiant first and foremost to God. We see it in schools, in sports competitions, at the office and even in church. We are taught to look at the worth of ourselves as individuals and we are praised for relying on our selves in order to get ahead.

This teaching of relying on self starts at an early age in our society. By the time our kids can speak a full sentence they are saying “I can do it myself” and as they get older we further instill this belief by saying over and over “YOU can do it. You can do it.” I don’t think many of us have ever thought of instead saying, “Because you belong to GOD you can do it. “

In our gospel lesson today Jesus is asking us to shift our point of gravity to relocate the center of our attention, to change our priorities. Jesus wants us to move from the reliance on self to reliance on God through Christ.

It is important for us to realize that Jesus is not asking us to leave our many-faceted world. He wants us to live in it, but firmly rooted in the knowledge that we belong to God. This is the meaning of “set your hearts on his kingdom first... and all these other things will be given you as well.”

The message that these 70 servants of God brought to the people of the towns and villages was essential and immediate. This was not a time to delay, but a time for decision. Earliest Christians were captivated by the conviction that the interval of time left before the end of the world was exceedingly short.

Today there is a different urgency in the message of living our lives reflecting who we belong to and that urgency has to do with living in the kingdom of God every moment of every day and telling others of it so that they may know the kingdom of God on this very earth. For living the kingdom of God now is the way to live life abundantly and peacefully no matter what is happening around us.

Now that we have established the answer to this question of to whom do we belong we must ask ourselves a further question. What does this answer mean in my life today? We see from our gospel lesson what it meant to the disciples in their day, we get a little glimpse of what it meant during the time of the declaration of independence, but what does it mean for each one of us today?

The answers will vary for each of us. Does it mean I need to change jobs? Does it mean I need to give more time volunteering? Does it mean I need to spend more time with my kids? Does it mean I need to give up some of my material possessions?

Does it mean I need to speak out about the gospel, spreading the good news even when it is among people who don't want to hear it? Does it mean spending more time in church or reading scripture or in prayer? What will it take today for you to live your life in order to reflect who you belong to?

We are called to let our lights shine in this world but also to realize that that light was never ours to begin with but God's. Jesus is the light and he becomes our light at our baptism. We need to nurture and focus on that true light that is not dependent on us but is a gift.

The good news of this gospel lesson is that our on going action does not depend on our own strength or efforts. When we realize we belong to God we free ourselves from the burden of relying on ourselves. This is an enormous gift - no matter how much society tries to tell us that we can do it on our own - we can't and to know that we don't have to because of who we belong to is entirely freeing and life giving.

We rejoice not in the power of our accomplishments, but in the knowledge that our "names are written in heaven" and that because we belong to God who knows each of us intimately by name we are able to go forth bearing the peace that Jesus speaks of in this Gospel lesson - a peace that passes all understanding - a peace that reminds us that yes indeed, the kingdom of God is here.

