

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

The Rev. Jonathan Gibson July 8, 2007

“Living for the *Plus Ultra* in the Here and Now”

Luke 10:1-20

10:00 am, Holy Communion

The Text

Luke 10:1-20

Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-Two

1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. **2** And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. **3** Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. **4** Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. **5** Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' **6** And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. **7** And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. **8** Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. **9** Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' **10** But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, **11** 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' **12** I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Woe to Unrepentant Cities

13 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. **14** But it will be

more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. **15**
And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be
brought down to Hades.

16 "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you
rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

The Return of the Seventy-Two

17 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons
are subject to us in your name!" **18** And he said to them, "I saw Satan
fall like lightning from heaven. **19** Behold, I have given you authority
to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the
enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. **20** Nevertheless, do not rejoice in
this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names
are written in heaven."

Introduction

In Valladolid, Spain, where Christopher Columbus died in 1506, stands
a monument commemorating the great discoverer. Perhaps the most
interesting feature of the memorial is a statue of a lion destroying one
of the Latin words that had been part of Spain's motto for centuries.
Before Columbus made his voyages, the Spaniards thought they had
reached the outer limits of earth. Thus their motto was "Ne Plus Ultra,"
which means "No More Beyond." The word being torn away by the lion
is "ne" or "no," making it read "Plus Ultra." Columbus had proven that
there was indeed "more beyond."

This morning Jesus draws our attention to the "more beyond" In the
last verse of the gospel passage Graham read, Jesus tells us that the
"more beyond" is to be the focal point of our present life. Just as
Columbus gave his life to the discovery of the more beyond; as
Christians we are to do the same. Everything we are and everything
we do in the present is to be shaped by our knowing that our names
are written in heaven.

As we consider the Gospel reading we see that the seventy disciples
have just returned from a successful missionary journey, where even
demons were submitting to their Christ-given authority. Jesus
celebrates with them and affirms that they had indeed exercised the
authority he had given to them. He emphasizes this by saying: "I saw
Satan fall like lightning". But he then shifts their focus from the limits
of their success to the more beyond. "Do not rejoice in this, that the

spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Jesus seems to be saying that the thing that should matter most to us in our present life is the assurance we can have of our future life. Why are we to rejoice that our names are written in heaven?

This past week I read the following description of heaven: "An unknown region with a well-known inhabitant". What a helpful way to think of heaven.

Richard Baxter who lived between 1615 and 1691 expressed his thoughts about heaven in verse:

My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim,
But it's enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with him.

To those who have learned to love and trust Jesus, the prospect of meeting him face to face and being with him forever is the hope that keeps us going, no matter what life may throw at us. This is why we are to rejoice above all else in knowing that our names are written in heaven.

This thought is to the Christian like the magnetic north/south axis is to a compass. Just as the earth's magnetic field allows freely moving magnets to take on the same orientation, the promise of heaven helps to orientate us as Christians. Without this promise we would be like a compass that could not locate the earth's magnetic field. We would be spinning aimlessly. But because of the promise of heaven we learn three things in this text that helps us to live for the *plus ultra* in the here and now.

- 1:** To know that our names are written in heaven motivates us to live towards those who are not Christians with an openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit.
- 2:** To know that our names are written in heaven helps us to anticipate opposition.
- 3:** To know that our names are written in heaven allows us to know that joy will be the quality most characteristic of those in heaven.

1: To know that our names are written in heaven motivates us to live towards those who are not Christians with an openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus sends out the seventy with a specific mission. As they enter into the homes of those who welcome them they are to extend a greeting of peace. The peace they are to offer is that which comes from the Father. The quality that this peace brings is an ordering of life in a way that allows for people to bring their lives under the rule of God. The seventy were to be sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit. When they discerned a household was open to receive this peace they were to stay in that home. If the household was not open to receiving this peace, it would return to the disciples and they would carry on their way. Jesus put it to them like this:

5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' **6** And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. **7** And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.

These verses teach us when there is a receptive audience to the Gospel, take time to visit with these people. Enter into a relationship where the everyday customs of sharing in meals as hospitality is offered and received provide the place where the peace of the Father is extended to others.

There is something very important for us to see in this teaching. We do not have to force the peace of God on any other person. Rather we are to be open to knowing when we are being directed to cultivate a friendship that allows for the Gospel of Peace to be nurtured.

Just as there will be those who truly receive this peace there will be others who will not be open to this peace. Later on Jesus suggests that the reception or rejection of this peace might not be limited to individual homes but entire towns.

8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. **9** Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' **10** But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, **11** 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'

Here the Peace Jesus refers to is broadened to now encompass the kingdom of God. This is the kingdom where Peace reigns and is of course fully at home in

heaven. So here we see Jesus saying that for those who receive the peace he offers, they are in fact entering now into that kingdom that is eternal. But those who reject His peace are also pushing aside the offer of the kingdom of God in the present, and quite possibly heaven in the future.

"I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."

Now if you know the Book of Genesis chapter 18, you will know that Sodom underwent a terrible judgment. Here Jesus is saying something that we do not want to hear. To reject the kingdom and the peace of the kingdom is to exchange it for the wrath of God's judgment. A judgment that will be worse than the one Sodom went through. This is sobering teaching. If people choose not to live under grace then they will not experience grace on the Day of Judgment.

There is a cause and effect in the kingdom of heaven. If peace is received peace will be known. If peace is rejected it will mean for the people and towns who have pushed it aside a judgment and punishment represented in stark terms by Jesus.

13 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. **14** But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. **15** And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

The contrast is striking is it not? At verse 20 Jesus says: "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." But for those whose names are not written there Jesus says "Woe to you".

We are to be discerning when it comes to sharing the kingdom's peace with others. For those who will receive it we can share with them in the kingdom's joy. For those who reject it there is sadness and the proclamation of woe which Jesus alone can pronounce.

This brings me to our second point:

2: To know that our names are written in heaven helps us to anticipate opposition.

There is a tension presented by Jesus here. As those who go out announcing the Gospel of Peace we need to realize that there are some who will respond to us very negatively. It is not just that they are indifferent to the Gospel but they are actually hostile towards it. Jesus says we will face opposition. Even so he sends us out. Listen again to the language he uses to speak about the sending out. It is in verse 3:

"Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves"

Now I want you to look down to verse 16:

16 "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

Just as Jesus sends the seventy so too verse 16 shows us that the Father sent Jesus. As we read the Gospel it is so clear that he was sent as the Lamb among the Wolves. We are to be in the world as Jesus was in the world. This will mean that we will at times experience feeling very vulnerable. What could be more vulnerable than a herd of lambs amidst a den of wolves.

It is worth noting that as Jesus says these words he has been teaching in and around the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum.

You will notice on the map below that these three towns are in very close proximity to each other. These towns were the centre of Jesus' Galilean Ministry. As verse 13 – 15 make clear he was not well received. Perhaps here, where he was close to his Nazarean home he experienced something of what he meant about being a lamb among the wolves.

Jesus made his heart a chalice for the world's blood and tears. For those who follow in His name we are to do the same. Such a heart will know the pain that comes from those who oppose the Gospel of Peace

So while yes there is vulnerability associated with being sent by Jesus, we need not be robbed of knowing the Kingdom's infinite value.

I think it is interesting that in verse six Jesus says that the kingdom peace will return to those to whom it has been entrusted if rejected by those to whom it was offered. Listen again to this verse:

6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.

This is an interesting turn of phrase. It suggests that we are not only to be the stewards of this peace but we are also those who possess this peace in our own lives.

This peace is a wonderful gift that those who know that our names are written in heaven can experience. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and when we know that in the midst of life's complexity and confusion we can know that peace that does pass all understanding this is a most gracious gift. We can therefore consider this thought. Although another person may not receive this peace and may in their rejection be antagonistic toward us; these people need not rob us of this peace. This is a significant point for all to reflect upon.

I can so often be swayed by the reactions of others. When they respond to me negatively or to the message of the gospel I can end up experiencing in myself a certain disquiet and anxiety that I internalize as personal rejection. But Jesus implies here that this need not be so. If others do not receive his peace offered through you and me we can move on. For the one they are rejecting is not me, is not you. But rather Jesus and the one who sent him.

Because we know that our names are written we can anticipate opposition while at the same time living towards those who are not Christians with an openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

3: To know that our names are written in heaven allows us to know that joy will be the quality most characteristic of those in heaven.

Joy will be the quality most characteristic of those in heaven because we will both see the glory of Christ and will be like him as we share in his glory. The Bible teaches us that the ultimate end of creation will involve our delighting in and displaying "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6.) We will display the glory of God by the Christ-exalting joy of our heart, and by the Christ-exalting deeds of our resurrection bodies.

By the Spirit of God who dwells in us, our final destiny is not self-admiration or self-exaltation, but *being* able to see the glory of God without disintegrating, and *being* able to delight in the glory of Christ with the very delight of God the Father for his own Son. Think of this, we will be able to do visible Christ-exalting deeds that flow from this delight.

And in this way a wave of revelation of divine glory in the saints is set in motion that goes on and grows for all eternity. As each of us sees Christ and delights in Christ with the delight of the Father, mediated by the Spirit, we will overflow with visible actions of love and creativity

on the new earth. In this way we will see the revelation of God's glory in each other's lives in ever new ways. New dimensions of the riches of the glory of God in Christ will shine forth every day from new delights and new deeds. And these in turn will become new seeings of Christ which will elicit new delights and new doings. And so the ever-growing wave of the revelation of the riches of the glory of God will role on for ever and ever.

And we will discover that this was possible only because the infinite Son of God took on himself the human nature so that we in our human nature might be united to him and display more and more of his glory. We will find in our eternal experience that his infinite beauty took on human form so that our human form might increasingly display his infinite beauty.

Conclusion:

This understanding of life is able to encourage and motivate us to live in the present as those who respond with passion and commitment to Jesus' invitation and commission to be his witnesses in a world where we are to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit as we share the Gospel with others, aware that we will receive both invitation and opposition. By so doing were are living for the Plus Ultra in the here and now.