

Galatians 6:7-16

Luke 10:1-11, 16 -20

## Introduction

In recent years the medical world has been increasingly aware of the problem of sepsis: A condition where the body's own reaction to infection turns against its organs and can kill with frightening speed. It was reported last week that an alarming number of people with this condition are not receiving antibiotics within the one hour time scale that is necessary from diagnosis in order to bring about recovery. The urgency is unmistakable. Action must be taken.

We see something of this urgency in today's Gospel reading. Last week we heard about the true nature of discipleship, of what was required of those who wish to follow Jesus. And now we are told that Jesus sent out 72 of his followers to towns and cities he was planning to visit, to go ahead of him and prepare people for his preaching and teaching.

Their mission is an urgent one because they are harvesters. Israel is ripe to be harvested and gathered in during the brief Harvest season. Linger too long and it will be too late. These past few weeks I have been very aware of the tractors buzzing about our lanes as the farmers work quickly to bring in the crops as they ripen – and certainly before they can be spoiled by rain.

The mission of the 72 was to heal those who were ill and tell them, "The Kingdom of God has come close to you". This means that God's rule is present in the world and that people should be summoned to enter it before the opportunity is gone forever.

The real presence of the Kingdom was to be proclaimed by word of mouth, the healing of the sick and by the bestowing of heavenly peace on those they were ministering to. The Kingdom of God is present whether we like it or not, or whether we believe it or not and it represents a reign of peace to those who accept it and a sentence of doom to those who do not.

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We might ask, "What is the significance of sending out 72 disciples?" Is Luke seeing Jesus in the light of Moses, who chose 70 elders of Israel that were given a share in God's Spirit and two others that God anointed and were thereby equipped to help him lead the people of Israel.

In the original Exodus the Israelites rebelled, grumbled and didn't want to go the way that God was leading them – which is why Moses needed the extra help. And certainly, in Jesus' ministry most, if not all of his contemporaries simply didn't want to know. Despite all his healings, and the power and shrewdness of his teaching, the way he wanted them to follow – the way which he knew would lead them to God's true Exodus, (his true release of his people from slavery to sin) – was simply not the way they wanted. Thus it had been since his first sermon at Nazareth, thus it would be right up to his last days in Jerusalem.

So Jesus sent the 72 out to prepare the way for his mission and he told them to fulfil their task with the utmost haste.

They were:

- Not to carry even the most basic of possessions
- To avoid the time-consuming futilities of eastern wayside etiquette.
- To waste no time on those who would not listen.
- To leave behind any scruples about the ritual cleanness of food; which would certainly hamper their effective progress. They were to eat what they were given thus accepting hospitality and not causing offence to those they sought to reach.

At the heart of his call was the message of peace. "Peace to this house," the messengers were to say, looking to see whether there was a 'child of peace' there. Jesus' enemies were for the most part not wanting peace – peace with their traditional enemies the Samaritans, or peace with the feared and hated Romans. They wanted an all-out war that would bring God's justice swiftly to their aid and get rid of their

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enemies once and for all. This demonstrated a profound misunderstanding of the God they purported to follow.

The history of Israel shows a cycle of behaviour which continued through centuries; with the people of Israel turning away from following God to worship idols, to disobedience and sinful behaviour. God would turn his back on them, they would run into trouble, whether it was defeat in battle or being taken into slavery. When disaster struck they would turn back to God asking his forgiveness and help and God would rescue them. This was the cycle of events that they were expecting to play out again. Goad their enemies into attacking them, turn to God for help and ultimately defeating their oppressors.

But Jesus, in sending message to the places he intends to visit is aware of the urgency. He has come to break that cycle and he knows he will not pass this way again. If people don't respond to his mission this time it may be too late. He is the last herald before the disaster that will fall upon them. Rome will destroy them, their city and their Temple. They will be dispersed throughout the world. God, in his generous compassionate love is offering a solution that will, once and for all put an end to the cycle of rebellion and obedience that they had lived by. He plans to bring humanity back into relationship with him through his sacrifice of himself once for all upon the cross. Yet they did not listen. They were heading for disaster.

This explains the urgency and sternness of Jesus' charge to the 70. They were not offering people a new religious option which might have a gentle effect on their lives. They were holding out the last chance for people to turn away from Israel's flight into ruin, and to accept God's way of peace.

As I studied this passage this week I felt so many echoes of our current situation. I was chatting to a young couple who wanted their baby baptized and they commented that it seemed to them that the world was a darker place than when they were young. There certainly seems to be a large amount of aggression and discord, of selfishness and materialism. Our

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governments seem to have stopped seeking the good of the people they govern and appear to be rushing headlong into disaster; not just in our country but throughout the world.

The message that Jesus gave to his disciples to proclaim is as relevant now as it was then. 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'. God is offering us his rule, his salvation, his forgiveness and his love. At Thriplow this morning I baptized a baby girl and in that service her parents were declaring that they want God's rule in the life of their family - and the fact that the Kingdom of God is present is a message that we all ignore at our peril.

So what does this all mean for us in practice? We need to ask ourselves what our response is. Do we welcome God's rule of peace in our lives and here we allowing it to transform us, our church our village or have we, as so many in Jesus' time turned our backs upon it? The choice is ours but the time is short. It is an urgent question