

Galatians 6. 7-16

Luke 10. 1-11, 16-20

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!

As the angels sing the shepherds the greeting of heavenly peace, now Jesus sends evangelists of peace ahead of him, bearing a simple greeting of peace. The reign which the angels have announced is now spreading from town to town, household to household. Peace through powerlessness.

As the misery and evil of the genocide that is being committed against the Palestinian people continues to be unleashed, Netanyahu, the Herod of our time, has cynically proclaimed peace through strength. Instead of angels breaking through the dome that is above the heavens, the impenetrable iron dome defends against weapons unleashed against Israel with American-made weapons, and Israel unleashes a vault of destruction over parts of Iran. Peace through strength.

Into every town and place of Roman-occupied Palestine, towns subdued by the *pax Romana*, Jesus sends his barefoot messengers of peace: *How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.*

Instead of peace through strength Jesus sends powerless emissaries. Instead of being clad in finely tailored suits, they carry little and are shoeless. But Jesus knows that these powerless messengers will be an affront to the powerful: *See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. They go in powerlessness, in poverty, with no clever marketing program, no threats to comply or bend the knee. Simply bearing the greeting of peace; a simple greeting which will enrage the powerful; as it still does in our time.*

A formula for success? A well thought through peace-strategy? Only the message the kingdom of God has come near to you; whether it is received or rejected.

The Christian missionaries who came to this country came on the shirt tails of Empire; It was as though the carnage of invasion and colonisation cut a swathe of destruction through which mission might take place. And they came with purses and bags and shod feet; eager to redeem the natives from their shameful nakedness.

The pattern of evangelism that we have received has become a colonising command to the church – go and conquer – hearts and minds at least - and convince. The evangelical imperative of our time has been Jesus’ charge to the disciples on the mountain at the end of Matthew’s gospel: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.* We children of empire, raised to celebrate the continuous band of pink circling the globe, have read Jesus’ command as children of the British empire, with a colonising imagination. It is as though it’s not possible for us to imagine being sent in powerlessness and empty handed. What would be the point of that, we might ask?

As Jesus sends the seventy, he’s not particularly hopeful, at least of numerical results, bums on seats, scalps for Jesus. He knows the messengers will be received by some and rejected by others. In wiping the dust, they are deterred from prosecuting a peace through strength, simply

to wipe the dust and move on. Simply by their humility others will know the presence of the kingdom.

In our results-oriented world where marketers and advertisers seek to whet the appetites of our every whim and algorithms know our every move, what good is the greeting “Peace to this house”? But it is a greeting of affirmation; it is a word of solidarity; it is a program to find like-minded people; to bind together hearts that are committed and longing for peace.

In four weeks we will mark the centenary of the opening of this building as a place of Christian worship. It will be an opportunity for gratitude and celebration of the vision and generosity of the early members of this church – that this has been able to be a place of worship and prayer and community and care, for generations. It is easy for us to settle though; this is not just a temptation to us in the church; it is very human to settle and hunker down. It’s especially tempting for us to settle as what we have seems to be passing away. And, as with all buildings they demand our attention and require constant maintenance and risk becoming an end in themselves. And, as with all institutions and organisations there is always the risk that the founding vision becomes secondary to simply keep the wheels turning. Too closely identifying with our property, our pleasure in the closeness of our fellowship, and the security these provide divert our attention us from the call the poverty that seems to be the pattern we are called to as bearers of the good news.

As Jesus says in the sermon on the mount: blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The poor in spirit? Poverty of spirit as a state of blessedness? When we are honest that at some level our spirit’s are impoverished, we come to know something; come to know what is of vital importance when all is stripped away. The strange paradox of the gospel is that poverty of spirit is the foundation of mission; that being brought to recognising our own need, our own lack means that we are able to be bearers of hope; hope, not as a kind of happy-days-are-here-again sort of cheeriness, but by being people who know the broken one who is the light in the darkness and who have come to bear this strange light in our very beings. We don’t need to go with power, or spin or a glitzy campaign; we are simply to be light bearers.

The changes that we have made to the way this congregation is led over the last months has been an act of hopefulness. A reorienting in order to meet the needs of the congregation in this time. It is an act of anticipation, sharing and spreading leadership through the congregation. As we commission elders and church councillors today we are reminded that the role of the Church Council in leading us is *give priority in its life to building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining members in hope, and leading the congregation to a fuller participation in Christ’s mission in the world*. Our calling as church as we gather to worship God each week is remind ourselves and celebrate this kingdom in our midst; this kingdom of peace. And we gather for ourselves to be equipped to be messengers of peace – the quest at the heart of God’s desire for the whole creation. But I sense we are apprehensive to go; not sure what message it is that we are to carry; what result we might anticipate.

As we commission a new group of leaders today I pray we might bear these things in mind: *building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining members in hope, and leading the congregation to a fuller participation in Christ’s mission in the world*. That we might be able to come to know more deeply what it means to be bearers of God’s peace.

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