

## **THE APOSTLE – YOU!**

Today's scripture from Luke's gospel is about an appointment – an assignment. Jesus appoints seventy people to become his advance team for the mission he is on. They are to go into all the towns and cities he intends to one day visit. Let's think for a minute about how we view the story because the perspective we take makes a big difference to what we hear and how we might react.

There is the *movie view* where this story is like a film we go to watch. It is about *them* – the people Jesus sent out on a mission. At the end of the movie, we might comment, "I liked that, it was stimulating." "It was okay – not great, but okay." We see ourselves as spectators.

In the *drama view* the story is our story. We are the ones who will take the roles and play the characters. We listen to the story with a view to taking the parts and living them out. Rather than spectators, we are participants – we become the appointees.

Taking the *drama view* means it is not just about what *they* did – it is also what *we* are called to do – how we are appointed and called to participate in God's vision – God's mission – in the world.

To really understand the text and enter into it as participants we need to let go of some misconceptions we might have and to understand the associations intended by certain words used. First of all we shouldn't really talk about *the twelve disciples*, as if there were only twelve of them, or *the twelve apostles*, as if those twelve were the only ones Jesus sent out – that's what apostle means – *one sent by another as messenger, ambassador, or agent*. The group of Jesus' followers and the group of those sent out by Jesus in his ministry included women as well as men. Luke and Acts make clear that the twelve did not serve any function of governance for the church. Indeed, most of the twelve aren't portrayed as prominent leaders among the disciples or the early church. The gospels don't even agree on their names – just on there being twelve of them – just as there are twelve baskets of leftovers from *the feeding of the five thousand*.

Twelve – as in the twelve tribes of Israel – is a number representing all of Israel. Jesus' choosing twelve men to represent the twelve patriarchs of Israel shows his authority to reconstitute and restore the people of Israel. Jesus' feeding the five thousand (five being the number of books in the Pentateuch, the books of Moses that all Israel accepted as scripture) and there being enough fragments of bread to fill twelve baskets brings to mind the sojourn of God's people in the desert as the Hebrews were freed from the narrow place of slavery and formed as a people – God's people. And much as the blessing of God's manna in the wilderness was of such abundance that none had need to hoard and all of God's people were fed, Jesus proclaims God's blessing on creation such that all are fed with enough leftover to feed all Israel all over again. Twelve to represent a wealth of history and promise. Twelve baskets – twelve sent out.

So let go of the notion of only twelve apostles – in this text there are seventy sent out. Seventy, like the number of rabbis who translated the text – now known as the Septuagint – in 200 BCE. Seventy, like the number of elders chosen to share Moses' spirit of prophesy and burden of leadership. Seventy, like the number of times time seven that Jesus' followers are to forgive. Seventy – a number of completion – of wholeness.

Jesus sends out seventy as workers for the harvest, to proclaim that God's reign has arrived. Jesus sends out seventy – a number of fullness and wholeness – to exercise authority over every spirit and every condition that oppresses God's children.

And all God's people should pay attention, because this concerns us all – remember we are not mere spectators in God's mission but appointees – apostles - participants. Those sent out aren't a tiny group of guys in bathrobes. It's all God's people. It's you and it's me – everyone who will hear the call – as the workers are few indeed compared to the abundance of the harvest.

Yet even as we participate in the drama of this text and align ourselves with the seventy apostles we recognize that the focus is on Jesus and Jesus' instructions to those appointed rather than on the campaign itself. What does Jesus say?

Jesus says: *See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.* I don't know about you but this doesn't seem like an encouraging beginning to me. It sounds ominous – dangerous in fact! Lambs are meek, innocent and tasty. Wolves are hungry; they run fast, and they have big teeth. Not an auspicious beginning for us as participants in the drama – not something to be taken lightly.

Seventy are appointed – we are appointed. Seventy are advised of the dangers and challenges of the mission – we are advised – warned. Then we receive the packing list which consists of all the things the seventy are **not** to take. Seems a bit peculiar doesn't it? I've been given packing lists before – for camp – for my trips to India and Africa. You know what it's like: remember your sunscreen and your medications – don't forget to bring extra batteries for the camera and a sweater for the cool evenings. Packing lists are usually about what we should take rather than what to leave behind yet Jesus says: *Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals...*

What should they take? What will we need to fulfill this mission? Don't pack apathy, love of comfort and desire for recognition. Bring only a spirit of service, a sense of humility, and a fervent desire to interpret the good news for today's world. Pack light. Make yourself available.

Remember that Luke begins the story of Jesus' public ministry in Chapter 4 with Jesus' version of a *mission statement*, delivered to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus announces: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

It is an ambitious mission statement, Christ's mission on earth. We are the body of Christ so this mission is the mission we are called to engage in, as we are in Christ.

Put this on your bathroom mirror to see when you brush your teeth at night and in the morning. Stick it on a post-it on your car's dashboard. Put it in your wallet or purse to see whenever you pull out a credit card or some cash. Because you are a member of the body of Christ, and Christ's mission statement is for you.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon you, because God has anointed you to bring Good News to the poor.*

Impossible? Under ordinary estimates of human capacity, I guess so. But for the Body of Christ, the mission for which Christ was anointed cannot be impossible. The Spirit with which Christ was anointed has been poured out – not just on the twelve – not just on seventy – but on the whole of God's people.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon **you**, because God has anointed **you** to bring Good News to the poor. And nothing is impossible with God's Spirit. **Amen**