

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year: B

Amos 7.12-15; Ps 84(85); Eph 1.3-14; Mk 6.7-13

"I give them Jesus"

Mother Teresa was speaking to persons who had come to meet her from all over the world. Among the groups to which she spoke was one of religious sisters from many North American orders. After her talk she asked if there were any questions. "Yes, I have one," a Sister sitting near the front said. "As you know, most of the orders represented here have been losing members. It seems that more and more women are leaving all the time. And yet your order is attracting thousands upon thousands. What do you do?" Without hesitating Mother Teresa answered, "I give them Jesus." "Yes I know," said the woman, "but take habits, for example. Do your women object to wearing habits? And the rules of the order, how do you do it?" "I give them Jesus," Mother Teresa replied. "Yes, I know Mother," said the woman, "but can you be more specific?" "I give them Jesus," Mother Teresa repeated again. "Mother," said the woman, "we are all of us aware of your fine work. I want to know about something else." Mother Teresa said quietly, "I give them Jesus. There is nothing else." We Christians have something the world cannot find anywhere else. It is Jesus, the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Ordination Sermon

Before Jesus sent out the Twelve to preach the message of the kingdom and heal the sick, he preached their 'ordination sermon'. The message of this sermon is considerably different from what we might expect from the one who came to save the world (Jn 3.16, 17; 12.47; 1 Tim 1.15), and different also from the commission he gave these same men after his resurrection (Mt 28.16-20). What does this instruction teach us?

Particular Sheep

Before the Gospel was given in full measure to the Gentiles it had to be proclaimed to Israel. Jesus would not reject a person from any nation who came to him (Mk 7.24-30; Jn 10.16; 12.20, 21), but the focus of his earthly ministry was to the lost sheep of Israel. The reason that Jesus specifically prohibited the Apostles initial ministry to Gentiles and half-breed Samaritans was so that God's covenant nation would have a final opportunity to hear and receive the Gospel (Mt 1.21). On their refusal, the Gospel would be removed from them and given to the Gentiles. Although there will always be a remnant of the physical seed of Abraham coming to the Messiah, God completed his dealings with Israel as a nation when, through the Roman army, he destroyed the Temple in 70 AD.

Proving Signs

The primary duty of the Apostles on this evangelistic tour was to preach the message that 'the kingdom of heaven is near.' They were given powers to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, and drive out demons as signs to the nation that the Messiah and his kingdom had truly arrived among them. The covenant people knew that God revealed himself to their nation through miracles and validated his prophets with signs. Even when God performed miracles in other nations (e.g., in Egypt or Babylon) it was primarily for the benefit of his people. So, the Jews at the time of Jesus sought signs to validate his ministry and that of his emissaries (Jn 2.18; 1 Cor 1.22; 2 Cor 12.12).

Laborer Deserves his Wages

Jesus carefully instructs the Apostles not to use their miraculous gifts as a means of furthering their own pride or material gain. They had been saved from eternal wrath by the grace of God, and in turn they were to give freely to others, God's message and the gift of healing. This instruction applies to the Church today (Acts 8.18-20). Although teaching elders are to be paid for their work (1 Cor 9.14; 1 Tim 5.17-18) by the Church they are never to make payment their objective for preaching (Tit 1.7; 1 Pet 5.1, 2). Also, the Church should never charge people to hear the presentation of the Gospel.

People's Sincerity

The Apostles were sent as a test of faith. Most people assume that this faith-test applied primarily to the Apostles. During the Middle Ages the leaders of

monastic movements, thinking this way, sent out mendicant friars to subsidize their preaching by begging. They misapplied this passage. The primary faith-test was for the *hearers*, not the preachers. The Apostles were instructed to take along only one walking stick and a pair of sandals and no extra provisions as a test of the worthiness of the recipients of the message. The hearers were to show evidence that they had received the message of salvation by ministering to those who brought it to them.

Supporting Gospel

Applied to the Church today, the test is not how poor we can keep our pastors but rather how willing we are to share with those who come into the midst of our congregation. If we are true recipients of the Gospel then we will be willing to show hospitality to visitors and everyone in the congregation (Rom 12.13; Heb 13.2; Jam 2.1-4; 3 Jn 5, 6), and support whole-heartedly those who preach the Gospel (Phil 4.16-19).

Pronounced Sentence

Blessings and curses are associated with covenant keeping and breaking (Dt 27-29; Josh 8.30-35). When a household or town was found unworthy because it rejected the Good News, it was to be cursed by the Apostles. The reason was that the family or inhabitants of the town had rejected the Messiah and showed no respect for the Covenant vows they were under curse.

To the One who Rejects the Gospel

The Apostles went out in pairs (Mk 6.7), so that there were two witnesses (Dt 9.15; Mt 18.16) to the rejection of the Covenant. They exercised disciplinary action on those who rejected Christ (Mt 16.19; 18.15-20; Acts 18.6) and essentially ex-communicated these members of the covenant-community by pronouncing an anathema (curse) and treating them like pagans (1 Cor 16.22; Mt 18.17). Jesus tells his disciples the eternal consequences will be worse for anyone who has been raised under the obligations of the Covenant and has rejected the message of the Gospel than for a person who has never heard the Gospel. This should engender a sober reflection in each of us.

Promised Shalom

In contrast, those who receive the messengers cordially are those who are receptive to the coming of the Anointed One. A blessing of eternal peace

(Shalom) rests on them. Jesus understood this practical reality and sent out the twelve disciples on their own to apply their most recent training and to begin to exercise their delegated authority. He went in one direction (the towns of Galilee) and they went in another (village to village). Jesus was likely accompanied by many of the other disciples that he had. It is only the Twelve who, in their special capacity as the foundation 'stones' of the NT Church, were sent out at this time. They were sent to apply on their own what they had learned and to exercise the office to which they had been ordained.

Good Works

Each one of us who is part of Christ's Kingdom is also called to **serve the King in some way**. We are not all called to preach, teach, or perform miraculous healings. But we are all called to love God and demonstrate this love through good works (Rom 12.1; Eph 2.10; 4.12). We must not just *learn* from Christ, we must go and *act* for Christ!

Signs

The Apostles, holding a unique office, were given the power and authority to heal the sick and to drive out demons (Lk 9.1). These signs demonstrated their position as official representatives of Jesus (2 Cor 12.12). If we focus on what the Twelve did—i.e., healing—we will miss the key message about what they learned as they ventured out on their own. While they were without the physical presence of Christ, they were not without his power. What is not subject to debate is that the power of Christ extends beyond his physical presence. Jesus is no less able to work through his sent messengers today than he was two thousand years ago. As a reigning sovereign, he continues to send his ambassadors and endows them with exactly the gifts, skills, and words that they need to accomplish their mission. His power is not diminished because he now reigns from Heaven.

Healing the Sick

The Apostles anointed the sick with oil (Mk 6.13). Along with wine, olive oil was considered to have medicinal properties by the ancient world (e.g., Lk 10.34). The oil used by the Apostles had no magical properties and was not a direct instrument of healing. Its use may symbolize: that the disciples acted under

Jesus' authority through the power of the Holy Spirit or, conversely, through the use of proximate instrumentality in the healing.

All Societies – The Apostles went 'everywhere'. Of course, this does not mean that at this time they went to the ports of Spain, the courts of the Han dynasty in China, or the sports arenas in Tiberian Rome. Their immediate mission was to the settlements in the Galilean region. However, it is instructive that Luke uses a Greek word that has universal implications. He anticipates the work of the Apostles who carried the Gospel beyond the immediate vicinity of their own family groups and national tribes into the Roman world (Acts 1.8). The message of Christ is not to be confined to one place or ethnic group. It is not a religion for the Jews only, any more than it is a religion only for the descendants of Mediterranean Greek and Latin speakers or of northern European Anglo-Saxons. Those who follow in the footsteps of the Apostles are to preach the Gospel to the people of every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev 7.9).

Announced Salvation – The Gospel writers tell us that the Twelve preached two things: **that people should repent** and accept the 'gospel'. This means that they preached God's requirements in the Law and salvation through grace—that man is a sinner and has broken God's Law and must repent, and anyone who repents of his or her sin and believes in Christ will be saved. Two thousand years later, the Church is sent to preach exactly the same two messages.

Practical Conclusion

The Church must preach the Law and speak prophetically against corporate and individual sin. However, the Church errs greatly when it champions particular forms of government or economic systems such as western democratic socialism, or endorses political parties that support anti Christian values. The Gospel must also be preached and the Church is to encourage its members to live selfless lives and teach benevolence. However, this does not mean that it is to become a closed community separated from the world (e.g., a monastic, a cult-like community). **The Church is sent into the world to seek the lost.** The Church must stay focused on preaching two things, and only two things: mankind as **lost in sin** and mankind as **saved in Christ**.