A Sermon for DaySpring

By Brett Gibson

“Neighbors and Ambassadors”

Luke 10:1-20

July 7, 2019

One of the many things I love about DaySpring is that we allow the church calendar to orient our way of thinking about time

* you’re more likely to hear sermons here on Advent and Epiphany and All Saints than on Thanksgiving or Mother’s Day or American Independence
	+ the lectionary cycle follows the life of Jesus for half of the year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and the great season of Eastertide
	+ the other half of the year—essentially summer and autumn in the Northern Hemisphere—is inaugurated by the celebration of Pentecost: the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church
	+ this year, Pentecost Sunday was on June 9
		- so, from June 9 until Advent begins a new church year on December 1, we’re in the season of or after Pentecost
		- this “season” is usually called Ordinary Time or sometimes the season of the church
* this alternative way of marking time often means we think alternatively about all manner of things
	+ when your primary narrative is the life of the church in the power of the Spirit, it re-contextualizes everything else: things like power and freedom and love
		- those concepts, which have other meanings in our culture on July 7, take on Jesus meanings on the ninth Sunday of Pentecost
	+ so, where the wider culture’s vision may be focused on tanks in the capital and fireworks on the Brazos, we’re invited—in this season after Pentecost—to consider the work of the Spirit in sending the church
* first, a joke
	+ A moth walks into a podiatrist’s office.
	+ The podiatrist says, “What seems to be the problem, Moth?”
	+ The moth says, “Ah, doc, if only there were one problem.
		- my wife doesn’t love me anymore
			* it’s not just that she doesn’t love me
			* I don’t even remember a time when she did love me
		- my daughter has married a man I despise and who despises me
		- my son is a wretched failure and, to be honest, when I look at him, all I see is a reflection of my own failures.
	+ I just don’t know how to go on, doc.”
	+ The podiatrist says, “Well, those sound like very serious problems, Moth, but I’m a podiatrist. What brought you here today?”
	+ And the moth says, “Oh, the light was on.”
* I love that joke because the joke is that moths are stupid and just go where the light is on.
	+ but the other thing about the joke is that, almost all the time, humans also just go where the light is on.
* most of our lives are lived reacting to what passes in front of us
	+ I have a teacher who calls it “episodic meaning”
	+ we just go from episode to episode in life without reflecting on
		- what we’re doing
		- why we’re doing it
		- what we should be doing
		- why we aren’t doing what we want to be doing
		- we’re moths going to a podiatrist’s office because the light’s on
* in the lection from Luke’s Gospel, we find ourselves in Samaria
	+ in the first half of the Gospel, Jesus is in the northern part of Israel known as Galilee: in towns like Nazareth and Capernaum and Bethsaida
		- he’s healing, he’s teaching
	+ at the beginning of Luke 9, Jesus sends his twelve disciples throughout Galilean villages to do what he was doing: to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal
	+ at the end of Luke 9, Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem
		- we know that in setting his face toward Jerusalem, he’s setting his face toward the cross
		- but to get from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south, he’s going to go through Samaria
	+ so, after Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem in Luke 9.51, here now at the beginning of chapter 10, he has another sending
	+ this time, though, it’s not the Twelve
		- we discover—and Luke develops this throughout his Gospel—that Jesus has many more followers than just the Twelve
		- to Israel, he sent 12
		- to Samaria, he sent 70—or 72
			* let’s not get bogged down in numbers
			* just know that the symbolism, whether it’s 70 or 72 really has everything to do with the list of nations in Genesis 10
			* 70 or 72 resonates with Jesus’ commission of his followers to all the peoples of the earth, starting in Samaria
	+ Jesus’ intention was never for the kingdom of God to be Israel but for the kingdom of God to spread over all the nations of the earth
	+ Jesus signaled this in the very first sermon he ever gave in Luke 4
		- he was in his hometown of Nazareth, and he opened the Isaiah scroll and read about the Spirit of the Lord anointing him
		- the illustrations he gave of the Lord’s deliverance and healing were not of Jewish men and women—the great stories of Abraham, Ruth, David, Esther
			* no, the stories he told were of Elijah and the widow in Sidon
				+ and of our OT lection: the healing of Naaman by Elisha
				+ outsiders who were made insiders
* this sending of the 70 represents the first cross-cultural commission of Jesus’ ministry
	+ it anticipates the book of Acts and the worldwide expansion of the Jesus Way
	+ Jesus gives very clear instructions to his 70 followers: take no purse, no bag, no sandals
	+ eat whatever is put in front of you
		- for first-century Jewish people, this is a very difficult word, if you’re being sent throughout a foreign land
			* eating whatever is offered to you isn’t just a polite acceptance of a meal
			* eating whatever is offered to you is spurning cherished custom and belief in favor of the gracious acceptance of hospitality to heal long-standing disagreements between at-odds communities
		- he’s sending them in the same way he himself goes
			* a sort of “as the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus now sends his followers”
		- it’s a way of vulnerability, of simplicity, of relying on others
		- this is no one-sided mission, as though the 70 are going about establishing the kingdom of God
		- the 70 have something to offer, absolutely
			* but he’s teaching them that they also have something to receive
			* the success or failure of their mission will not be solely dependent on them
		- they will declare peace wherever they go
			* but it will take a person of peace in each place for peace to take root
	+ I’ve struggled with this image of a harvest
		- I suppose I’ve tended to read it in a transactional, even triumphalist way
		- we, the workers, go and save all the lost people—the harvest
	+ but what if we’re all at least potential co-workers?
		- those 70 had a direct commission from Christ
		- but as they went, they implored God to raise up new co-workers, other even unexpected co-workers who would participate with them in cultivating the harvest of God’s faithful people
		- so we today are the results of their prayers and the prayers of generations before us
		- we are harvest…and we are workers
		- as Paul says in 2 Corinthians, we have been reconciled to God through Christ
			* and then we have been made ministers of reconciliation
			* ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us
		- that has profound implications for the way we participate with God in the world
		- we are not the holders of all truth and wisdom
			* we bear witness to the work of God in Christ
			* we have been sent to heal the sick, to proclaim God’s kingdom
			* and we pray for other laborers to join us
			* because the harvest is indeed plentiful
			* but we can exert no control over whether peace is actually established: we proclaim peace and pray for others to join us in its establishment
			* also, we’re not just a mouthpiece, delivering God’s message for him: we are ambassadors
			* as mission theorist David Bosch said
				+ “The ambassador is more than just an instrument that carries the messages to and from his government. He is not the same as the diplomatic mailbag. He is a personal representative of his government, the very embodiment of the one who sends him” (43).
* Luke would remind us that Jesus’ followers are a sent people, a chosen group of people—not chosen to go to heaven when they die while the rest are consigned to eternal torment
	+ that’s how some would have us understand the doctrine of God’s “election”
	+ but the way chosen-ness is articulated throughout the Jewish and Christian scriptures is by tying it to relationship and responsibility
		- so, Abraham is blessed, chosen not so he can be a happy man or spend eternity with God—Abraham is blessed so that in him all the families of the earth can be blessed
	+ the 70 are chosen to be with Jesus and are sent out to herald his kingdom

It is the work of the church to read the Gospels in fresh contexts.

* What does Jesus’ sending of the 70 mean for us in 2019 in Central Texas?
* let’s break the episodic meaning we get lulled into, the moth-like tendency to react, and instead listen to Jesus in our fresh context
* there’s a church down in San Antonio—the San Antonio Mennonite Church—that has opened its doors to migrants who have fled the violence in their home countries to seek refuge
	+ they offer long-term respite for asylum seekers as they wait for their court hearings, ministering to refugees’ physical needs, and finding themselves spending much of their time helping these women, men, and children process the profound traumas they have experienced
	+ many of you know their pastor, John Garland
		- his parents are David and Diana Garland
	+ Eric and Jenny Howell have been down to his church on several occasions to see the work they’re doing and have served as sort of ministers to him
	+ DaySpring’s church leadership, with special expertise from our own Victor Hinojosa, is considering how we might partner with the work of the San Antonio Mennonite Church
		- in addition to helping defray a small part of the financial costs, we’re considering the possibilities of volunteering to take a shift once a month in their shelter
		- and even hosting a single mother and her children in Waco while they wait for their asylum hearings—which can take up to two years
		- the need is incredible, as you can imagine
		- and I mean incredible in the sense both of profound and big in a logistical way
			* it would require many hands, many lives, many areas of care and love
* But our ears and our hearts are open
	+ - because, you see, we’ve been sent
		- and as we are sent, we remember that
			* we’ve been sent together
			* we’ve been sent in vulnerability, with nothing but the authority of the one who sent us
			* we’ve been sent to declare peace, to heal the sick, and to proclaim the coming kingdom of God in our words and our actions
* the harvest is great; there is much work to be done
	+ while the work is urgent, the way of Jesus precludes any sense of anxiety on our part
		- we move forward detached from our normal ways of exerting power over circumstances
		- and instead offer our lives
* We remember the words of Lesslie Newbigin, who reminded us that Jesus didn’t write a book; he formed a community.
	+ that’s the legacy he’s left for the world: a community filled with and sent by the Holy Spirit
	+ in this season of Pentecost, let us leave here today reminding one another that we are the sent people of God

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