

PENTECOST 4C SERMON for July 3, 2022 at Grace Lutheran

TEXT: Luke 10: 1--20 by Jim Hill

TITLE: “Brighten Your Corner”

Today’s Gospel Reading appears to have very little to do with our world today. But after many years of preaching experience and looking at Bible passages, I’ve learned that there is always something in a text that’s relevant to our modern times. There’s always some concept or sentence, or maybe just a phrase, which applies to our current life-situation.

My seminary professors used to say that a good preacher must always make that “hermeneutical leap” from what the passage meant in the original context, and what the passage means in our present context.

In today’s Gospel Reading from Luke chapter 10, we hear about Jesus’ sending out seventy disciples on a training mission, and he gave them specific instructions about what to do on this mission. Jesus had sent out the original twelve disciples on their training mission; now it’s seventy being sent out. You get a sense here, of growing and expanding mission.

The question is: What does their mission in that first century have to do with our mission in the twenty-first century?

I believe that the key is in verses 8 and 9, where Jesus says: “Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”

The kingdom of God has come near to you. The implication is clear, that neither those missionaries long ago, nor we, are the ones who “bring forth the kingdom of God” (as a Marty Haugen hymn puts it), but they, and we, are to announce that God has already brought his Kingdom to this world. God’s rule and reign came by the incarnation of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who was the long-promised Messiah, King of kings and Lord of lords, God in the flesh of a human being.

The early disciples and apostles were announcing the kingdom come; and not only announcing it, but in Christ's name they were exercising the power of God over evil spirits, the power of God to heal, and the power of God to change hearts and minds.

With the coming into the world of the Messiah-Christ, the Kingdom of God was present as never before. Jesus introduced it to his first disciples and apostles, and they, in turn, introduced it to the people of Middle East and beyond, in those first few centuries. Thus, the Kingdom of God "grew" in an ever-widening circle, out from Jerusalem, where Jesus' death and resurrection occurred. As I've said before, Christianity spread out like waves in a pond after a rock is thrown into the water; and that Rock was Christ.

So the Gospel of Jesus Christ has spread around the world over these past 20 centuries, first of all by means of the marvellous system of Roman roads by which missionaries could travel throughout the Roman Empire. And second of all by Johannes Gutenberg's invention of moveable type and the printing press in the 1400's. This led to a revolution in communication through the mass production through pamphlets and books. The very first thing off new printing press was the Bible!

But the communication revolution we've seen in the last 100 years has been the greatest of all, enabling the Word of God and the Good News of Jesus Christ to be spread throughout the world. I don't think there's any corner of the world that hasn't been affected by radio signals and electronic communication and lately the World Wide Web.

So, in a way, the mission begun by the early apostles is done! The kingdom of God has been proclaimed throughout the world and virtually everyone has heard the Good News of God's grace and love in Christ. I said "virtually", which is a good word! Because everyone may be able to hear the Gospel by a TV preacher or an electronic message, but that's not the same as the personal approach demonstrated by the early apostles. In those days of travelling missionaries, people who wanted to hear the Gospel indicated their desire by inviting Peter or John or Paul or Timothy or one of others, into their homes, or into their tents, or whatever their dwelling, so

they could show them hospitality and welcome them personally, and converse with them and relate to them face-to-face.

That's something we still need today. But we're living in a secular world, in which science is god and religion has a bad name; a world in which most people think they don't need Christ or any of his ambassadors to teach them what's good and what's not. Any teacher who is wise or any self-help book that seems to work, will do. Any helpful philosophy will do, whether it includes Jesus or not. As if Jesus was just another religious teacher! Nothing could be further from the truth.

So, our world is in the paradoxical position of having heard and accepted the Gospel yet now have cast it aside. The leaders of civilized countries have been talking about a "New World Order", but it seems to be a house of cards that is falling apart.

If we can do without Jesus, then we can do without the Christian church. All we need is a community like the "Victoria Truth Centre" that focuses on positive thinking and developing your "potential", where everybody's welcome to join, religious or not,

So the church which Jesus originally started seems to be passé. Have we modern people outgrown traditional Christianity? I guess so, because many people are voting with their feet.

If I can use another illustration: It's as if modern people who were once anchored near the shore have drifted away from that shore, further and further out to sea, and they can't seem to find their way back. I'm reminded a song that blues-singer, Eric Bibb, sings on YouTube: "Seem Like the Whole World Got the Blues".

It seems to me that the whole world needs the Gospel more than ever!

So Jesus still needs disciples to share the Good News, to share God's love in word and deed, Christians who back up what they believe with love and care for their neighbour. We are God's ambassadors, God's angels (angel means messenger), and we have important work to do, whether we are successful or whether we fail, whether others praise us or criticize us, whether we are glorified or vilified. We are still God's chosen people, baptized into Christ and part of Christ's holy Body.

Today's reading ends with the apostles returning and reporting to their master Jesus about their great successes. Jesus replies (in verses 19 and 20): "Yes, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions (metaphorically speaking) and over all the powers of evil, and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless (Jesus says) do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Your name and my name are written in heaven. Which means that ultimately, nothing can hurt us. And there is no higher honour, no greater glory for us, than simply being God's angels, God's agents, God's ambassadors, letting our light shine in a dark world, as we were called to do.

I want close with the lyrics of a song written by an American named Charles Hutchinson Gabriel who died in 1932. It's a song called "Brighten the Corner Where You Are". It's a good summary of our Christian mission in this modern world.

Here are the lyrics:

Do not wait until some deed of greatness you may do
Do not wait to shed your light afar
To the many duties ever near you, now be true
Brighten the corner where you are

And the refrain is:

Brighten the corner where you are
Brighten the corner where you are
Someone far from harbor you may guide across the bar
Brighten the corner where you are

The second verse goes:

Just above are clouded skies that you may help to clear
Let not narrow self your way debar
Though into one heart alone may fall your song of cheer
Brighten the corner where you are

And the third verse:

Here for all your talent you may surely find a need
Here reflect the bright and Morning Star
Even from your humble hand the Bread of Life may feed
Brighten the corner where you are.

Amen.

There are many recordings of this song on YouTube. My favourite is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-BtmSNHZi4> (The Purple Hulls)