

Two Callings

One of the things which I often find difficult about the rhythm of my week is the necessity of beginning to organize the service for next Sunday today. In fact, before I leave home in the morning to come to the church office, I will have begun to select and program the music for the service next Sunday so that the bulletin can be printed. The entire order of worship which will be printed will be done by Tuesday morning so that it can be checked for errors on Wednesday, so any changes must be made by then. For many weeks, that is not an issue, but sometimes that title for the sermon really could have been more apt....and this is one of those weeks....because although gathered and sent...the two callings I had in mind when I set down those words of this title...are indeed two functions of our call...which really I think, is one call and perhaps a better title would have been fine print. You know, those small words at the bottom of all advertisements and agreements we encounter these days. With today's gospel passage, we are just past the point at which Luke tells us that Jesus has "set his face toward Jerusalem", the gathering of the disciples is finished. In each of the gospel accounts, there is a narrative which describes the beginning of Jesus' ministry at the Jordan River, followed shortly by a gathering of a group of followers. These followers are gathered from rather usual walks of life, most are fishermen from Galilee who answer a simple invitation: "Follow Me." The gospel of John describes the first invited and the invitation a little differently....but again, it is a rather simple set of words...when asked by two of John the Baptist's disciples if he is the promised Messiah, Jesus responds, "Come and see." They then become his followers. And so they leave their homes and travel the Galilean countryside with Jesus; listening to his teachings and witnessing the healings and other deeds of power which he does. They witness many amazing things as Jesus told them that the kingdom of God was near. The heart of the message which Jesus proclaims describing the kingdom of God declares that kingdom is defined by justice, grace, and compassion. The "fine print" of discipleship is that his disciples are called to live in this world in that manner. Living into this discipleship lifestyle is not easy as it requires putting "self" in an unaccustomed role—that is, not first. And not only are those who answer this call to discipleship are given these instructions to live in this way, they are now sent out to deliver this message to the world. Somehow, when the message is one of justice, grace and compassion, all positive, wonderful sounding goals, you would think that it would be welcomed and well received. Often, however, the message of Jesus faces opposition, contradiction and hostility from the culture into which it is delivered. This is true today just as it was from Rome and those in power when Jesus lived. The reality of our culture is that there are many other kingdoms present to which people have given their allegiance other than to the kingdom or reign of God. Some give their allegiance to the kingdom of Wall Street which tells us that we have to make as much money as we can in order to have the lives we want or need. Others have sworn allegiance to the kingdom of Hollywood which declares that only those who are young, thin, beautiful, rich or possess that "right look" have any value in the world. Yet others have given their allegiance to Madison Avenue which declares that driving the right car, wearing the right shoe, cologne, or other product from the correct vendor and living in the correct neighborhood, will demonstrate your worth and bring fulfillment. So when proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God in the terms Jesus used in that first declaration of his ministry in Nazareth as he read from Isaiah, well these goals challenge those other kingdoms.

That proclamation was: (*“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 favor.”*) Allegiances to those things of this world interfere with justice, grace and compassion—with the attributes which characterize the community which resides in the kingdom Jesus brought near and which lives according to the teachings he gave. So, perhaps, if we go out into the world as ones sent like those first disciples carrying our commitment to following Jesus seeking to live within the reign of God, then our text from Luke this morning addresses what we might expect to find. Jesus warns his disciples he is sending them out like lambs among wolves. But he also gives them instructions on the message he wants them to take. Jesus sent out seventy disciples to do what he had been doing—spreading compassion and mercy and telling people who respond in faith that “the Kingdom of God has come near to you.” But Jesus knew that there were competing kingdoms and contradictory loyalties that the disciples would encounter. He knew that some his disciples encountered would not be willing to give up those loyalties. So what did he tell them to do when that happened? Essentially the same thing. Tell them that the Kingdom of God has come near. It is the same for us. We are called to follow Jesus in discipleship, practicing the values of the kingdom of God among a people who have given their loyalty to a lot of other kingdoms. And we are called to proclaim the message to one and all: the kingdom of God is right here. In verse 5 of our passage, the first proclamation sounds deceptively simple. “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’” This word of peace is the first word, the opening word, the announcing word. So the first word you should give is the same when you meet someone. Notice that Jesus does not tell them to do any sort of assessment before making this proclamation. He doesn’t ask them to determine whether this house follows the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or whether this house has kept the Law or whether this house is likely to receive the good news being brought. Jesus doesn’t ask them to do a risk assessment or pre-judge whether this house will be worth their time. Jesus doesn’t ask us to pre-judge those we meet either. Jesus goes on to instruct them in the dynamic of sharing peace with verse 6: “if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you.” In this statement we have Jesus’ assumption that as his disciples, they will be well grounded in God’s peace—God’s shalom. Their well-being rests in their confidence and trust in God. As those who are his disciples, confident in God’s presence with us, then it is possible to share that presence with others. This means that we can engage with others in ways that means we treat them not as objects upon which we act but as sacred others with whom we are called to be fully and peacefully present. If they do not share this peace, Jesus’ advice is not reactivity, scorn or polemics, certainly not shouting. Instead, he reassures the disciples that their peace will not be diminished and cannot be taken away from them...“it will return to you”, they are told. Jesus does not instruct them to argue, convince, or threaten if they are not welcomed. He does advice them to signal their moving on by shaking dust off their shoes which symbolizes that they will not be weighed down by rejection or paralyzed with trying to figure out what they did wrong or could have done differently to produce a different outcome. From our passage this morning we can find our own pattern for taking this message of justice, grace and compassion into our world. We can offer “Peace—Shalom to those we encounter! Engaging with them as valued children of God and remaining confident that our shalom will remain with us. And we can know that whether or not they receive the message,

the kingdom of God is available to all. Of course, when speaking of justice, grace and compassion in our world, some will respond with opposition and even hostility. After all, to some that message contradicts the values they have adopted from the world. Despite the fact that we have been raised to believe that we live in a "Christian" nation, it's not hard to see that there's not much "Christian " about our culture. The message of justice, of grace, of caring and compassion seems to have been lost in the conversation amid a loud shouting match where peace and shalom are not heard due to the loud voices of fear, distrust, prejudice and goals rooted in selfish interests. Despite the loudness around us, the fine print of our calling still insists that we proclaim to all: Shalom. And even if they do not want to listen: God's kingdom is near to them and it is God's reign of justice, grace and compassion which the source of true shalom and the hope for fulfillment in this life and beyond. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.