

Witness Requires Discipline

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Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

- [1] After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.
- [2] He said to them, As the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.
- [3] Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.
- [4] Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.
- [5] Whatever house you enter, first say, Peace to this house!
- [6] And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.
- [7] Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.
- [8] Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you;
- [9] cure the sick who are there, and say to them, the kingdom of God has come near to you.
- [10] But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say,
- [11] Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.
- [16] Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.
- [17] The seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!
- [18] He said to them, I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.
- [19] See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.
- [20] Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior, Jesus The Christ. Amen.

A certain man came to a psychiatrist's office, and, by coincidence, the doctor had just had a cancellation and agreed to see the young man. As the young fellow entered, he walked directly to the doctor's desk,

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refusing to sit down, and stood very stiffly beside the desk. He informed the doctor that he was there against his will and had only come to please his family.

The doctor asked the young man to tell him something of the reason why his family wanted him to see a psychiatrist. "Well, you see doctor," he said, "I'm dead."

The doctor had had them all, he thought, but this was a new one. "Really?" he asked. "How do you know you're dead?"

"How do you know you're alive?" shot back the young man. The psychiatrist decided this tack would not get him anywhere, so he tried another. "You are intelligent looking," said the doctor; "I'm sure you'll agree that dead people don't bleed." The young man agreed as to how this was true.

The doctor reached quickly into the drawer of his desk, asked the young man to roll up his sleeve, and jabbed a small needle into the young man's arm. A spot of blood appeared, and the doctor pressed a glass slide against the blood, then held it up for the patient to see. "There!" he said triumphantly. "It's blood!" "My God!" said the young man. "Dead people *do* bleed, don't they?"

This fellow was absolutely convinced that he was dead and not even blood, his own, would change his mind. Now, maybe some of us feel the same way that we're dead. As a Pastor, I hear it when people say that life has lost its luster and that it's just a rat race. Or, someone is having a 46th birthday and says, it's all downhill now. I'm washed up. Finished. Or someone loses a loved one after many years and gets so depressed that he wishes he were dead and acts dead. Or you can transfer the image from individuals to organizations say, the church, and discover congregations which are convinced that they are dead.

I preached in one once on the north side of Chicago. Few things I have experienced as a Pastor have been more depressing. Over 800 people were listed as members. 40 were in cavernous sanctuary. Most of them were in their 60's and 70's. I think I counted 7 children. Very few people smiled. The hymns were sung as death dirges. After the service I learned in talking with the members that the neighborhood was changing and that the congregation wanted no part in reaching out to Hispanics and blacks. The members who were left were only coming to church on Sunday to listen to supply preachers. No outreach ministry was going on. It had been 12 years since the church had had any form of an evangelism committee. It was also noteworthy that the furnishings in the sanctuary, although old, were very expensive and that the members themselves seemed to be very well-to-do. I think I saw several mink stoles. The coffee hour after worship lasted a full hour and the coffee was served from a silver coffeepot. The serving table was covered with a white crocheted table cloth.

One of the members said to me as I put my robes in the car, "Pastor, it's just a matter of time. We've had it." Another way of saying, we're dead. The sad fact was that it was true. Today that church is a Moslem temple.

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I thought about this as I read today's Gospel, for as I read it, it seems to be what you could call a prescription for the people of God who want to be alive in God and who want to be agents of life for the Kingdom of God.

The chief ingredient in this prescription which runs through the lesson, is one may have trouble with discipline. This, incidentally, is a major reason that only 28% of the population of the world is Christian. People don't like the discipline. Although Christianity is full of joy and has lots of room for fun, at its core, lived out as Our Lord talks about it in today's Gospel, it involves a certain discipline. It is not solely a matter of feeling good inside and only doing those things you feel like doing. Or those things most of the members want to do or that the Pastor wants to do.

Look at the text itself, please. The word Lord means boss or commander-in-chief. The word appointed means that the Lord did it. Volunteers were not waited on to raise their hands. The words sent them on mean that there was no waiting for the most convenient time for the largest number involved. The word 'ask' is an imperative. It is not preceded by please. The word 'go' likewise is not preceded by please. The words 'I am sending you' mean what they say and had no room for volunteers. The risks, the high risks involved are a part of the sending and are not optional. Lambs into the midst of wolves. All the instructions about what to take and what not to take, whom to linger with and how long, what to say first, where to stay, what to eat, whom to heal, how to handle rejection, etc., etc., involve discipline. Not emotion, but discipline.

There was once a football team at a high school. It was located in a small Oklahoma town which had produced a series of terrible football teams. They usually lost the important games and were invariably clobbered by their arch rivals from a nearby community. Understandably, the students and their parents began to get depressed and dispirited by the drubbing their troops were given every Friday night. It was just awful.

Finally, a wealthy oil producer decided to take matters in his own hands. He asked to speak to the team in the locker room after yet another devastating defeat. What followed was one of the most dramatic football speeches of all times. The businessman proceeded to offer a new Ford to every boy on the team and to each coach if they would simply defeat their bitter rivals in the next game. Knute Rockne couldn't have said it better.

The team went crazy with sheer delight. They howled and cheered and slapped each other on their

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padded behinds. For seven days, the boys ate, drank and breathed football. At night they dreamed about touchdowns and rumble seats. The entire school caught the spirit of ecstasy, and a holiday fever pervaded the campus. Each player could visualize himself behind the wheel of a gorgeous coupe, with eight gorgeous girls hanging all over his gorgeous body.

Finally, the big night arrived, and the team assembled in the locker room. Excitement was at an unprecedented high. The coach made several inane comments and the boys hurried out to face the enemy. They assembled on the sidelines, put their hands together and shouted a simultaneous "Rah!" They ran onto the field and were demolished, 38 to 0.

The team's exuberance did not translate into a single point on the scoreboard. Seven days of hurrah and whoop-de-do simply couldn't compensate for the players lack of discipline and conditioning and practice and study and coaching and drill and experience and character.

Such is the nature of emotion. It has a definite place in human affairs, but when forced to stand alone, feelings usually reveal themselves to unreliable and ephemeral and even a bit foolish.

We all have our likes and dislikes. Things we like to do and things we don't like to do. And this is true in the church as well as anywhere else. The church as an organization. But we're talking about something different. We're talking about authentic Christianity - lived out as the New Testament describes it, especially in today's Gospel.

The implication here is that it really doesn't matter how one feels. One can even feel dead! It really doesn't matter whether you like to take risks or not. If a person has Jesus The Christ as Lord of his or her life, there will be lots of things done that you don't feel like doing. There will be lots of risks taken that you don't feel like taking. There will be the Lord's discipline followed, not because you want to, but because He is Lord.

People once told me when I accepted a call to serve out west that life in the west is different. You can't tell people what to do. There, it was said, they only do what they want to do. It's not like back east, they said, where you tell someone to do something and they do it. Well, this may be true for the unbelieving masses, but I can report after living all over this country that people for whom Jesus Christ is Lord are no different anywhere. They do what He tells them, or they try to. Discipline for the follower of Christ is the same in Pasadena as anywhere else. I can also report, incidentally, that people everywhere, including Pasadena, who are not followers of Christ, are just as independent as unbelievers here. You can't tell them to do something and get them to do it either unless they want to.

Discipline and disciple come from the same root. One cannot be a disciple without discipline.

One time in England, Sir John Barbirolli was conducting a great symphony orchestra before a standing

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room only audience. The concert hall was unusual in that it was used for cultural events on weekdays and for religious services on Sundays. On this particular Saturday evening, one of the patrons of the orchestra noticed that the clergyman who was to preach there the next day was in the audience. He leaned over and said to him, cynically, "When are you going to fill this hall on Sunday the way Sir John Barbirolli has tonight?" The clergyman looked his antagonist straight in the eye and said with a steady voice, "I will fill this hall on Sunday morning when you give to me as you gave to Sir John tonight, eighty-five disciplined men and women to be with him and to work with him."

Sometimes, though, the shoe is on the other foot. A husband and his wife arose one Sunday morning and the wife dressed for church. It was just about time for the service when she noticed her husband hadn't moved a finger towards getting dressed. Perplexed, she asked, "Why aren't you getting dressed for church?" He said, "Because I don't want to go." She asked, "Do you have any reasons?" He said, "Yes, I have three good reasons. First, the congregation is cold; secondly, no one likes me. Thirdly, I just don't want to go." The wife replied, wisely, "Well, honey, I have three reasons why you should go. First, the congregation is warm. Secondly, there are a few people there who like you. And thirdly, you're the pastor. So get dressed!"

Pastors are no different than anyone else. They too are under the Lord's discipline, even when they don't feel like it.

Now, I realize that this is probably not a welcome topic for some this morning. And that it probably won't be a welcome topic for many most any morning. But here it is. Instructions of discipline for the ones for whom Jesus Christ is Lord.

There isn't time now to go into all the minute details of the discipline, such as what it means to travel light. Let it suffice for now that we are reminded, each of us, that following Jesus Christ and calling him Lord means a certain discipline. And that is true across the board, young and old, men and women, boys and girls, rich and poor, clergy and lay, with no exceptions. And that the discipline is constant and not dependent on how you or I or any follower might feel at any given moment. Including the lazy, hazy crazy days of summer.

The earliest creed of the church was one brief sentence: Jesus is Lord! Down through the centuries it has been spoken by many people. Some were telling the truth. Many were lying. The difference was known in the way they either did or did not live under the Lord's discipline.

Witness requires discipline!

Let us pray. O God, you tell us in your Son Jesus, how we can be alive in you and be agents of life in your Kingdom. Give us strength and courage as we seek to submit to Our Lord's discipline in lives of self-less love and risk-taking service and witness. In Jesus' name and reign, we pray.

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Amen.

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