

## **Sermon for July 3, 2016**

Today's Gospel reading gives us an excellent blueprint for evangelism. But I'm not going to use the "e" word throughout the sermon today; because I've seen that it causes undo anxiety among those who hear it. Whenever pastors use that word we see a subtle change come over the congregation—eyes glaze over, people begin to fidget and I suspect that most of what's said after that word isn't really heard.

So today I'm going to substitute two words that cause less anxiety and may even be truer to the meaning of what we're called as Christ's disciples to be doing. They are mission and witness. In Matthew 28 Jesus gives us what is called "The Great Commission" where he says that we are to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything that he has commanded us. We are to also remember that he will always be with us.

In chapter 1 of the book of Acts Jesus tells us just before his ascension that we are to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth when we receive the power of the Holy Spirit. These two words are more descriptive and meaningful as to what we are called to do.

So what does the Gospel reading tell us? First of all we can't do this alone. Notice that Jesus sends the disciples out in pairs. When there are two of us we can encourage one another when we become discouraged, lose the faith or want to quit. Discipleship can sometimes be hard, but it's easier with a companion along the way.

Another thing is that Jesus started with a small group of people. Many congregations the same size as ours feel helpless about being able to do anything because we feel we are too small. Remember that Jesus started with a group of twelve disciples. The group he sends out in today's reading is only seventy disciples. Think of what they accomplished not only in today's story but after Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit. From this small core of believers hospitals, orphanages and refugee centers will be built. God has worked through murderers, adulterers, liars and other unlikely people to change the world. God can work through you and me to bring the kingdom closer to others.

The next thing is probably one of the hardest for you and me to do — be completely dependant on someone else. Think about it; they are to take no purse, no bag, no sandals and no guarantee as to how they would be received. Jesus couldn't email ahead to the next towns with pictures of the disciples telling the people to treat them well because they were representing him. No, all they had was the promise of Jesus to go with them, to do great things through them and then to bring them home again.

Some people have stated that they believe the decline of the church is related to the increase of the disposable income that people have; the money we can spend on things we want and don't necessarily need. With more money we have created the illusion of independence; we don't need each other or God.

Our culture has developed into one that tells us that our security is found through our possessions; encouraging us to spend and buy to satisfy our whims and promising to give us a sense of well being because of everything we have.

But all this does is give us a false sense of security and takes us further away from God and drives us to value things over people. During the sacrament of Baptism one of the things the parents and sponsors of the child renounce is all those things that take us away from God.

But notice what else Jesus tells us to do for our mission; he tells us to stay at the same house and talk with these people, eat with these people, build a relationship with these people. And if people welcome us or not we are to say the same thing to them, "Know that the kingdom of God has come near to you." We aren't to force people to believe or threaten them when they don't; we are to witness to them the peace of God.

For me out of everything here I think this is the most important; spreading the peace of God. So just what is God's peace? Let me explain it this way. I've heard many of you say that you don't know how you could have gotten through the loss of a loved one, your own devastating illness, a change or loss of a job, or fill in the blank without your faith in God. To me that is God's peace. The peace we feel knowing that we aren't alone in whatever we're going through, that eventually it will get better and that this life isn't the end.

Having God's peace doesn't mean that nothing bad will ever happen to us. It means that when the bad things do happen, we won't be going through them alone. God who loves us enough to become one of us and experience everything that we will through Jesus Christ; will not let us go through this life alone.

Sometimes that help comes through the sincere and understanding hug of a

friend. Sometimes it comes through the gifts of meals, rides to places that we need to go or through an understanding conversation.

As St. Theresa of Avila said with a slight change made, "Christ has no body on earth but ours; no hands but ours; no feet but ours. Ours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out to the world. Ours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Ours are the hands with which he is to bless others now."

This is our witness to the world about the God we worship and praise; the God who loves us and sustains us; the God who desires to have a relationship with us; the God the world needs so much.