

Sermon for 2.7.17

Over the past weeks we have heard about mission from chapter 10 of Matthews's gospel.

The entire chapter is dedicated to this topic and is a mayor discourse known as the Mission Charge. The importance of this discourse is second only to the Sermon on the Mount.

In this chapter Matthew makes clear that mission is an inherent function of discipleship. The gospel writer does not separate the disciple from the missionary.

They are one and the same, and amazingly, disciples can be so closely united to God, that it's possible for Jesus to speak of their relationship with him, in the same way, as of his relationship with the Father. And we hear this in the words, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

Whatever is done to the disciple, therefore is counted as being done to Jesus. *Even something as simple as giving a new disciple a cup of water, will not lose their reward.*

Matthew not only talks about the way of the disciple while Jesus was on earth, but he also sets the pattern for the early church.

For Matthew, discipleship is grounded in Jesus' divine authority.

In Jesus the new day has dawned.

Matthew leads into chapter 10 with the account of the cleansing of the Leper just after Jesus descent from the mountain.

Jesus mission therefore is marked by miracle breakthroughs as sure signs of Gods salvation intervention in history. Jesus inaugurates an age for people to have faith, to allow Gods reign to take over their lives.

The missionary zeal of the disciples begins with the lost sheep of Israel where they are sent to root out all falseness and sin that hold the people of God in bondage. It will however ultimately spread beyond Israel into gentile territory.

Jesus did not disdain those outside the fold as unredeemed and God-forsaken human rebels.

What the disciples preach is that Jesus as the true prophet of peace has arrived, though paradoxically, strife will be stirred up with this revelation.

In the first reading we hear how Jerimiah exposes the false prophet Hananiah, who claims to be the prophet of peace. Jerimiah proclaims that when the true prophet of peace comes he will be known by the people.

In the letter to the Romans Paul speaks about sin -*do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies....but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

For many the sinfulness of humanity, has been a main focus in the Christian faith – sin, we are often told, is the reason for the coming of the Christ, sin is what separates us from God, sin is why we are not to love ourselves or even like ourselves, sin is what we all have lurking somewhere within, ready to pop up at any time.

So I thought a definition of sin may be helpful here, and I particularly like the one by Saint Bonaventure, a Thirteenth Century Franciscan theologian and philosopher.

Sin, in Bonaventure's thought, is a turning away from God and a turning toward self in such a way that we become bent over, blinded in intellect, and entangled in an infinite number of questions. We wander about in the world looking for goodness or love because we are unable to recognize it within ourselves. Instead of being poor in spirit and radically dependent on God, as in the first beatitude in Matthews gospel, we make ourselves little gods and the center of our universe.

We use everything for our own purposes and we lose our sense of true relatedness. We therefore fail to recognize our dependence on one another and thus we fail to acknowledge our dependence on God.¹

When we understand and accept this vision of sin, rather than sin as some inheritance that keeps us continually unholy, and as something that lurks within, just waiting to burst into action, we are more likely to understand and accept that the love of God for his creation is the focus for the coming of Christ, that the love of God for each one of us is the focus and reason for the incarnation.

Now this vision does not deny sin, it does the opposite in fact.

In a contemplative way, it holds the paradox of sin and love together and allows us to recognize and accept our sins and grow and love ourselves and others compassionately because of them.

Our sin, in other words, receives the opportunity to be transformed by love, mercy and compassion - by the Grace of God in which we live, as Paul tells us thismornig.

This, I believe, is being brought from death to life through the love of Christ for us.

It is about being a person in relationship with each other who experiences the presence of God through Christ.

All three readings this morning come together as one revelation of salvational peace through Grace, which is the mercy and love of God through Jesus Christ.

Law itself, has been transformed by love.

This is what the first disciples and the early church proclaimed to the world. The true prophet of peace had arrived.

Our mission is to live by grace, by love and mercy in relationship with God through Christ and with one another.

¹ Iliia Delio, *Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love*. St Anthony Messenger Press, Ohio: 2007. P18

In this way we grow into him and quite naturally by our daily life, illuminate the experience of Christ to others, which is the peace of God that passes all understanding.

May the peace of the Lord be with you all.