

Sheep with Guns...

It must have been pretty daunting being a disciple of Christ. Especially when the 70 were sent out. Jesus telling them to go to essentially random peoples houses and stay with them. Pray for peace for them – work for them, break bread with them. Jesus prefaces the whole mission with ‘A large crop is in the fields, but there are only a few workers. The Lord is in charge of the harvest and you are the workers sent out to bring it in. Now go, but remember, I am sending you like lambs into a pack of wolves.’

We know intuitively that the harvest is the Body of Christ. The ‘yet to be converted’ those who are waiting to ‘be brought in’. We know that we should read ourselves into the 70 – those who are sent out to spread the love of God, to bring about God’s Kingdom. However, it starts to get scary when Jesus tells us to ‘Go, but remember, I am sending you like lambs into a pack of wolves.’ What does it mean to be a lamb? And why are we being sent among wolves? That doesn’t sound like very responsible Shepherding!

I was once told that Democracy is two wolves and a sheep, sitting down and deciding what was for dinner. Liberty is when the Sheep has a gun. Now I am

not vying for political revolution – but it might make sense why the ‘lambs’ were told later to pray for peace.

It seems to me that praying for peace is all they have. Lambs have no gun, no sword, no dagger. In fact Jesus tells them not to bring even money bags, travelling supplies or extra sandals. (This is hard for me to engage with given my love of shoes!) Yet the difference between holding a gun in your hand compared with holding peace in your heart is the difference between liberty and freedom. True freedom is letting go and no longer giving power to the things that control you.

Denial of possessions and power can be a deal-breaker for some – like the rich young man in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus takes away all of the safe guards we think we need in order to live in safety and tells the 70 to rely on the kindness of strangers – and even then – to expect that sometimes it won’t work out. People can be mean and cruel. They can devour you like wolves courting a sheep over dinner-time. Jesus addresses this by saying - those people that will not welcome and care for you – don’t let them change you – just shake the dust off your feet and walk away. If there is any judgement coming their way – it is not yours to give. It belongs to God alone.

So the 70 go out, and when they return to Jesus they are super-excited. 'Lord, even the demons obeyed when we spoke in your name'. Note that for the 'demons' to obey the 'lambs'— the lambs did not require a gun, or a sword, or money or possessions. It required 'peace' – that is what Jesus is preaching. This peace isn't necessarily a global peace where people put down their swords, that is the physical symptom of a greater peace – the peace in our hearts - when anxiety is comforted by the peace and love that God gives us. Anger and violence has the venom or 'sting' taken out of it by the peace and love that God gives – like disarming a snake or scorpion. Bringing a prayer to a gun fight.

Back to the disciples - the problem is that the disciples rejoice in their new found power over this world. There is consistent teaching that the things of this world are merely that – things - nothing of real importance. What is important is our 'being', who we are and how we treat one another. When we let the love and peace of God flow through us and into others we are bringing others in to gather the harvest. We don't need to be millionaires to spread the love of God, we certainly don't need extra shoes or a new Jeep. We need the peace and love of Christ in our hearts. Others will desire to know what you have that gives you such freedom that you no longer desire the 'things' of this world and instead to search for something deeper.

Jesus says 'Do not rejoice because evil spirits obey you, Be happy that your names are written in heaven.' He is saying 'instead let us turn your imaginations to God.' Turning our desires and longings to God. St Paul would tell that instead of imitating those around us – trend setters, celebrities, the rich and beautiful – imitate Christ. Christ who didn't cling to power, possessions and well....even life. Instead of the sheep reaching for the gun – true freedom was found by not clinging to what he had. Jesus gave his life for us – to show us how to live and how to die. Not dictated to by the world of man made up of money, possessions and power. Even deeper – just because the wolves have sharp teeth we cannot let ourselves be shaped by the cruelty of others. When you find yourself confronted by a wolf – do not be tempted to turn into a wolf yourself! Which is all too easy. How many times have you found yourself attacked by someone and your first thought is – 'Oh really? You don't know who you are messing with!! If you want a fight to the death...I will give you a fight to the death.' Suddenly you are a wolf yourself!

So what is Jesus saying?

1. We are sent to bring others in to the love of God. It might be hard and people might be cruel– but that should never change who we are. We must always be driven by the peace and love of God.

2. We don't need anything for the journey. No tools for self-protection or power. No money, clothes or extra shoes. Do not cling onto the safe guards of this world, because they are not real, they are man-made and we teach each other to want them. The difference between believing in Christianity and living in Christianity is a conversion in itself- when we move away from learning our desires from those around us to setting our desires on God as a way of life.

3. Do not rejoice in the power you find in this world. If you have power and authority over others – it is imagined and created by man. This power only has the value we give it. Do not be tempted to pick up the gun because its power is false and does not reflect your power in the Kingdom of God – where all are equal, all are wanted, all are loved and peace reigns. This is freedom.

So what does this mean to us? Where is the thanksgiving? All I have heard is that we will be led like lambs to the slaughter, that I should give away all of my stuff and that I don't get to play power games with people.

The thanksgiving and the pause for reflection is – that what you have right now is enough. It is more than enough. Free yourself from the need to have more, to desire the latest ipod502 or fancy car. You don't need it and the moment we convince ourselves that we do – we have missed the point. Instead set your

desire on God. And I promise you – you will never miss out on the important things in life. In fact – you will find more joy and more fulfilment than ever before. Live a life of radical love and peace and giving without reservation.

Living in this Christianity is true freedom because we are never held at ransom by man-made things. Imitating Christ is the gift that keeps on giving because by living in His freedom we teach each other how to live in peace and love rather than living *for* money, power and possessions, the things that will never make you happy or fulfilled. Instead look to the gifts that God has already given to us.

Our family, friends, each other right here, the stranger in the street, our talents, the sunrise, the birds, the smile of a child, the homeless, the widow and the fatherless and most of all – the love and peace of God that we have known in each other. These are all gifts that you have been given. They might not seem like much – but they are everything you need. Let us live in thankfulness – let us live as Christians and bring others to the joy we have known in the freedom that we have found. Go out like out like a sheep among wolves – don't be tempted to take anything with you, just the peace of Christ because the Kingdom of God is near.