

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9), Year C

Text: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

It's God' mission, not ours!

In the latest census of the Australian population, the question about people's religious affiliation showed that those who identified as Christians declined and the response of having "no religion" increased.

It can be difficult as we live in a world that is growing more and more anti-Christian with many people wanting less Church involvement in state matters such as teaching Christian Studies in state schools.

So how should Christians react?

Do we just sit back and say – well there's nothing we can do about it.

It's tough to know what we should do.

But we need to be careful that we don't take up a fight that really doesn't belong to us.

Paul had a similar situation happening in Galatia. A group of people known as the Judaizers were infiltrating the Christian community. They were introducing ways that were against the Christian gospel.

You may recall Paul warning the Galatians – beware of anyone who comes preaching a gospel different to the one that I came to you with. But he didn't tell them to take up arms against them.

He simply told them to be sure of what they believe and don't be misled by anyone. Let God deal with what needs to be dealt with.

That's what "anathema" means.

He encouraged them to live a godly life and let God fight the fights that need to be fought. He didn't in any way say that the fight wasn't important. But he encouraged them to not let anything distract them from what God has called them to do.

He said: *Don't be deceived – God is not mocked. But as for you: Don't grow weary in doing what is right.*

Let us work for the good of all, especially the family of faith. Let us support and encourage one another here in our congregation, our parish, and the wider church – the family of faith - because we are all in this mission together.

Let us always be focused on the cross of Christ – otherwise we will be distracted from what God asks us to do.

In last week's Gospel reading we heard James and John get distracted by a fight they were not called to fight.

The Samaritans rejected Jesus and they wanted to rain down fire from heaven to destroy them.

But Jesus rejected that.

Today the disciples were distracted also. They went out as missionaries for God. When they returned they were ecstatic. But they were excited about the wrong thing.

They were distracted.

Lord – in your name even the demons submit to us.

But Jesus reminded them of what was important:

Don't rejoice that the demons submit to you. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

When we watch the news on TV, or to read the newspaper, it can create a feeling of helplessness with all the crises of the world.

We are all involved in Christ's mission of renewing the world, of bringing hatred and injustice to an end. Establishing God's reign of love and peace. But in the face of the real problems of the world we often feel that our efforts are like a drop of water in the ocean.

Does what we do really make any difference?

In the struggle between the love of Christ and the powers of Satan, the battle between good and evil, are our efforts of any significance at all?

Does God see us as important factors in bringing about change in the world?

Of course he does.

Just as Jesus sent out the 72 into the world, Jesus left us with the Great Commission:

Go into all the world baptizing and teaching.

Jesus does however provide advice on how we are to go into the world as his people:

First, Jesus says that we are like Lambs in the midst of wolves: Jesus doesn't hide the fact that the world is going to oppose our message.

For a long time Christianity was a dominant voice in the world, but that is not how Jesus originally saw it. In fact he said: *The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.* We should never see the church as failing because it is struggling.

And we shouldn't see the world as our opposition to fight against. Jesus calls it the harvest and we are called to reap. To go out into the world even though the world will not receive us.

We are called to be salt and light in the world. Changing the world by how we live our lives, not by fighting those with whom we disagree.

As Jesus says – *they will know we are Christians by our love. (John 13:35)*

Carry no purse

When Jesus sent out the 72 he told them not to take any provisions with them.

Why not?

Because God would provide them with all they needed.

How do we know what to take when it is God guiding the mission? Too often, we have an agenda of what needs to happen – but this may not be God's agenda.

Too often we go out into the world and believe we know what needs to happen.

Jesus is saying – take nothing with you. Let God guide every step and every word and every action.

We don't know what God is going to do so we take nothing and let God lead the way.

We don't want to be like James and John demanding God rain down fire every time someone objects to us or criticizes us. Then we would have no mission. There would be no harvest to bring in; it would all be destroyed.

The mission is God's. We are his workers. We are bringing in God's harvest.

If we start to work with our agenda then we can interfere with how God is planning the harvest.

Farmers will adjust their harvest strategy according to how the season is. God too has a mission plan and asks us to let him guide our words and actions.

Dealing with rejection

Jesus then tells the disciples how to deal with rejection. It's not by calling down fire from heaven. No, he says when you enter a town that doesn't welcome you, go into the street and wipe the dust off your shoes.

In other words, don't let that rejection weigh you down. Move on.

Don't take the baggage with you and let the anger and thoughts of revenge distract you from the mission. Keep focus on the mission. Keep doing good, even to those who oppose you.

The Final Victory

Finally Jesus reminds us as to what it is all about.

When the disciples return to tell of their victorious mission work, Jesus is again worried about the distraction.

Too often we become focused on the successes. The success can become our motivation. The success can easily distract us and become our measurement of God's plan. When churches find success and grow they can become focused only on the growth.

Jesus says to the disciples – *don't rejoice at your success. Rejoice that your name is written in heaven.*

And so that becomes our motivation. Not success, but the desire to have others have their name written in heaven.

We can become disheartened at the result of our mission when the results don't happen.

When we are rejected we can feel hurt. But remember what Jesus said, they are not rejecting you, they are rejecting the one who sent you.

That is where the true hurt is, by God.

So, let us ask once again the Lord of the harvest to send us as labourers to his harvest

- to make us all faithful in our public witness to Jesus;

- to make each and every one of us faithful in bearing Christ's name and witness to all.

It is in the honour of bearing his name that we rejoice and that our names are written in heaven.