

We have read as our Gospel reading the account given to us in Luke's Gospel of Jesus sending out seventy followers to prepare the way for him. We hear also of them returning and telling their own story of what had happened. These accounts, preserved for us in the Bible have become not only their story, but the story of every generation of the Church as each generation in its own time and culture have told these. As we have done this we have heard God's story, God's word in our own time, in our own situation, in our own life.

I want to stay with this idea of telling story this morning as we prepare to welcome Maxim into the fellowship of the Church in Baptism. I talk about telling stories with some apprehension. Maxim's parents, aunt, uncle, godmother are journalists – maybe more are here. The other night Mark, Dyane and myself had an interesting chat about the rapidly changing nature of journalism. Print journalism, the familiar papers of earlier years, selling hundreds of thousands of copies, has long been under pressure, first with the advent of radio and television journalism, satellite TV the phenomenon of the 24 hour news channel and the consequent loss in advertising revenue. Then in more recent times we have had the advent of news websites and the whole area of social media and the modern phenomenon of Fake News, political figures and pressure groups bypassing the professional journalist using Facebook, Twitter and a host of other sites.

All this has had the effect of changing the way the story is told. The limited size of a Twitter post, what we are able to absorb on the screen of a smart phone or tablet have all changed the style of the delivery. The more nuanced argument of an in depth article in a broadsheet is bypassed in favour of a

shorter snappier piece. Faced with these challenges, the traditional news outlets such as the Irish Times and Independent and RTE have developed their own web platforms.

This need to respond to changing circumstances is not just an issue faced by contemporary journalism. It was an issue faced by the early Church as it moved out from its roots in 1st century Judaism into the wider Graeco-Roman world. If the Church were to grow, the Gospel had to be expressed in the language and thought forms of the world in which people were living.

Jesus spoke in Aramaic – the Gospels were written in Greek. The Creeds we use each Sunday, in which the fundamentals of the faith are expressed, are couched in the language of Greek philosophy,

At different stages in the history of the Church, there have been moments when the Church was confronted by major changes in the world in which it lived. At the Reformation, which coincided with the invention of the printing press, there were major changes. The invention of the printing press enabled new ideas to spread rapidly. Suddenly the Bible, recently translated into the spoken language of the day, was available in large quantities. New ideas, challenging the authority of the Church, spread across Europe and the face of Western Christendom was changed.

Jumping forward to the present, in the Ireland of the early years of the 21st century, the Church finds itself in a very different situation to past years, when the position of the Church in society was not questioned. That in itself is no

bad thing. There was a complacency, even a touch of arrogance, that came with that. ‘They know where we are.’; ‘Sure people may drift – but they will be back.’

That complacency must surely be challenged by the results of the last census; in which 48% of those in the Dublin Metropolitan area in the age group 20-29 declared themselves to have no religious affiliation.

We have a story to tell; the story of God, creator of this amazing world; the story of God breaking into the world in the person of Jesus, standing alongside the leper, receiving outcasts at his table, dying and rising that we might live; the story of God the Holy Spirit, present in the world, inspiring, strengthening, empowering. That is a story for a world in which people are becoming increasingly isolated and fragmented, in which loneliness is a growing problem; a world in which groups play on people’s fear of the other, the different.

How is that story to be told, how is that story to be heard? Mark and Dyane have brought Maxim for Baptism, just as James and Emma, Colm and Hazel brought their children Tadhg and Christopher for Baptism last week. In the service parents and godparents promise to encourage these children in the life and faith of the Church. For our part, we, as a congregation, undertake to support them and later in the service we welcome the newly baptised as fellow inheritors of the Kingdom of God.

I go back to the question, ‘How is that story to be told, how is that story to be heard?’ There is a 19th century hymn that many of us will have grown up with the refrain

‘Tell me the old, old story
of Jesus and his love.’ *C of I Hymn Book 489*

It is indeed an old story, a story for all time and for all ages. But that story is to be told afresh in each succeeding generation. How will the children whom we have baptised over these past couple of weeks hear this story?

I go back to where I came in, with the issues faced by journalists in the modern era and the issues raised by the ways in which people are accessing their news. They have a story to tell. But to tell that story they have to work with and work through these ways in which we now access our news. News outlets that fail to adapt simply go to the wall.

We have a story to tell. In the words of the hymn, we have a Gospel to proclaim, good news for all throughout the world. We have traditions of community, of inclusion, of tolerance, of worship that have served us well in the past. Let us not be afraid to give expression to those same traditions in word and forms that those such as Maxim as they grow up can embrace and understand.