

Appointed

Last week's Gospel for the 13th Sunday of the Year (which we didn't read because of the intervention of Sts Peter and Paul) told us of three encounters which Jesus has as he moves ever closer towards Jerusalem. Each one of them gives us an insight into the meaning of discipleship. Firstly that it's going to be uncomfortable (the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head). Secondly, that the moment of choice waits for no-one (leave the dead to bury the dead). And thirdly that the decision to follow Jesus has consequences (no-one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God). It is fair to say that for most of us, the experience of how our faith relates to our lives has not been so stark. So today's gospel where Jesus appoints the seventy two and sends them out *ahead* must be read with those three encounters in mind.

The fact that Luke alone describes this mission is of itself interesting. Of all the Gospels it is Luke who casts the widest net, as he clearly offers the gospel message to the gentile, non-Jewish communities of the time. The sending out of the seventy (two) would appear to be an example of a post resurrection event being inserted by Luke into the ministry of Jesus; the use of the title "Lord" for Jesus, and the fact that no other evangelist has knowledge of this episode, seems to indicate that this is an account of the missionary activity of the early church.

However my mind is also directed to another pair of disciples on the road. They are on the road away from Jerusalem and towards Emmaus and their story can become the model which expresses most clearly those three characteristics of discomfort, choice and consequence mentioned above. Think how disturbed Cleopas and his companion were by what they had witnessed (the loss of all they had hoped for). Think how when Jesus appears in their midst they are confronted with a moment of decision (You foolish men so slow to believe the message) and now think of the consequence of their choice (Did not our hearts burn within us?). Then place those feelings and emotions into the minds of the early Christians as they began the task of proclaiming the message: *The Lord is risen and has appeared to Simon* and you get a sense and a real feel for the vibrancy and urgency of the task they have been given.

The word which Luke uses to describe the seventy (two) as "appointed" has about it a meaning and a sense of more than simply being selected. They are sent to demonstrate and to show what the gospel is about. And this should be our understanding of our calling. We are not to regard ourselves as the finished articles. We are as St Paul tells us "only the empty vessels" into which is poured the love of God. Of course we will find the job and the task at times uncomfortable and we will be sometimes uncertain of our choice and afraid of the consequences, but we are chosen or "appointed" to show forth the power of the gospel to express the peace which it conveys, and through that peace, to cure those who are sick. That you may think sounds very ambitious, but apply it to your own circumstances and you will find people around you who live it daily and express it in their lives, doing so without any publicity or hype but by simply demonstrating and showing the gospel in action, and thereby making the kingdom of God very near to you.

May we have the courage to overcome our discomfort, make our choice and extol the consequences.