

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 7, 2019, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 10:1-20

"The Kingdom of God is Near You"

During the reading of the Holy Gospel, when Jesus speaks of a place – having been to Israel twice, I am transported there instantly in my mind. I can remember in 2014, just two weeks before coming to meet y'all for the first time, Marilyn and I with the nineteen people that we were lead to Israel, stood in the ruins of Chorazin. We went to Capernaum and Bethsaida, and there is really nothing left. That really speaks – one day there won't be much left of Douglas, unless we are more faithful than those people. It is ironic that the town that Jesus spoke from, Capernaum, was what He called His headquarters. It was from here that Jesus sent out 72 other people to heal, to preach by saying, "*the kingdom of God is near you.*" That goes for Capernaum, and Chorazin, Bethsaida, and even Douglas and Coffee County and beyond. Jesus knew that everyone in the kingdom of God has the responsibility to witness about Him to others. He knew that His time was growing short and that He would be leaving this earth and the only way people would know and hear about His love for them, His sacrifice for them, His grace and mercy for them - would be for His disciples, His followers to tell others. I would say that they have done a pretty good job. We are here today because someone told us about Jesus. So Jesus sent them out to practice, to get a feeling for what they would be doing when He was gone.

Jesus never said that it is going to be an easy task witnessing for Him.

- He tells the disciples that they are like lambs in the midst of the wolves.
- Jesus tells them what to say when people accept them,
- and then He also tells them what to say and do when people reject them because not everyone was going to accept the good news and redemption of His kingdom.

But what we need to remember today in 2019 – in Douglas GA, in Coffee County, is that Jesus wanted the disciples, those 72 to try, to go out among the people and tell others about Jesus Christ. You don't have to stand on a street corner with a "rollie" Bible – you just have to be you – and let others see what Christ has done for you in your life. That is witnessing to Him.

Jesus instructed them to travel light. I still don't understand that if I am going away for just a few days why I can fill a fairly large suitcase – without a lot of room left! What it must have been like for Amy going to Hawaii to visit her son and grandson? How many bags are not free that she packed away? You are bringing gifts, etc. You can't travel light. I am going to Pennsylvania in a week or so, and we already have boxes and things that we are bringing to our grandkids. It is amazing! Have you ever stood in an airport and watched people? They might be going away for just a weekend and they have 3 or 4 rolling bags! These 72 were told to pack extremely light. Jesus' instructions to greet no one on the road showed the urgency of their prophetic mission representing God. In that culture it was offensive to withhold greeting others. We live in a culture where we wave or nod our head to say hello – an example of Southern Hospitality. In the culture that Jesus grew up in, in the culture that Jesus lived in, it was important to be hospitable, and devout people tried to be the first to greet a person who

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was approaching. Jewish teachers of the Law agreed, however, that you should not interrupt your religious duties like prayer in order to greet someone. There is one thing I learned during our two trips to Israel is that hospitality is very important in the Middle East, believe it or not.

I struggle when I think of going to a strange land, with a different language and culture; different foods – if I will be depending on the hospitality of others it is a rude awakening. I am a little better having been to Israel twice – some of the unknown is gone. There is a very different and strange spice that they put in their meat; a hamburger is not a hamburger in the Israel. It seems to me that everything has that spice in it. We learn about other people's cultures. I never had humus before. Does anyone here know what "shwarama" is? I didn't either until my last trip in 2014 – it is awesome! It is chicken or lamb in a pita, with vegetables and a beautiful sauce. It was amazing; it was great! We had choices of fish or shwarama and I would go for the shwarama, being allergic to the fish. We learn different cultures. It is amazing. How about falafel? Have you ever had falafel? Chickpeas – they are awesome fried up. I could not get my kids to touch them. You really learn when you visit people of other cultures. Thousands of Anglican Missionaries who are walking in faith to spread the wonder and majesty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All of them trying to remain obedient and faithful in cultures that they might not fully understand – but they are there for one reason - to let the light of Jesus shine – showing others the Way – the only Way to salvation.

In John 14, on the night before He died, Jesus is telling the disciples about heaven and that He is going to prepare a place for them. Thomas wants to know the way to get there, and so Jesus answered, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (Usually this is where people cut it off and say 'that's very nice', but we need to see the rest of what Jesus is saying.) If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."* Philip said, *"Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."* Jesus answered: *"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."* (John 14:6-11) Jesus could not make His identity any plainer – so that they would understand and be able to share the absolute truth about Him. Remember that in just hours – Jesus would be arrested and then in just a few hours more Jesus would be nailed to the cross. He said, *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."* Just as an aside – let me say this: the eleven disciples and Matthias, who replaced Judas, were willing to die. If the Gospel of Jesus Christ was a fabrication – do you think they would have been willing to die the terrible deaths that they did?

Jesus sends the 72 and other missionaries to follow the model which He showed us – healing the sick and praying. Jesus performed miracles so that people would believe in Him, and He asks us to do the same, in fact, in John 14 verses 12-14 Jesus explains *"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things*

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than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." When Jesus makes the promise that if we ask for something in His name, He will do it, it is in the context of bringing people to faith! Jesus did not do miracles to prove who He was, He did miracles to share His love, His compassion and mercy. He wanted to touch the leper and he was instantly healed. He wanted to be touched by the woman with the bleeding issues; wanted to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead – not to prove who He was – He did it in the quiet of her room. He did it because of His compassion and love – and He still does that today! Not only are we share the Gospel of Jesus with others, but we need to be trusting in the power and promise of Jesus! A great way to start is to take home our Sunday Bulletin, and the Parish Life which has our Prayer List. These are the people in our family that need prayer. I get emails from people who are sitting in this room today asking me to put people's names on the list, and then they tell me of the wonderful things that happen because of prayer. I could tell you of things that have happened just this week of God's answering prayer in a merciful and wonderful way. Take this homer with you and would you please pray for those names? That Parish Life fits beautifully on a refrigerator with a little magnet. When you are having your cup of tea or coffee in the morning sit down and ask God. Do something wonderful for those names. You can do it anywhere you want in the comfort of your home or office. Take it home with you today. Use the prayer list!

People are usually deeply touched, knowing that you would care for them enough to pray for them. Prayer touches the hearts of people - all the arguments in the world may not touch a person's heart, but a personal prayer will. When we pray for people, the first thing that we should do is to invite the Holy Spirit to come and to touch them - He will, and they will have an experience of the presence of God. That is one of the greatest gifts that you could give to someone.

Today, we begin using our brand-new Book of Common Prayer – 2019 from the Anglican Church in North America. It is full of prayers and Psalms that can truly bless you or others. The ones in your pews have been given to the church as a memorial from the family and friends of Martha Griffin Evans, and you can use them here in church. You can purchase a copy for yourself – just put your order on the clipboard. I have already ordered quite a few, and I have got them ready for those people that ordered them. If you don't want to order one – you can read or download an electronic copy in a .pdf format from our website.

Jesus asks us to be blessing our neighbors, developing relationships with them, and praying for them and in doing so we are presenting the Gospel to them. Many of you are here today because someone told you about St. Andrew's Anglican Church, about the amazing parish family that we have – with a "Peace" that goes on forever. If we show Jesus' love to others - we can be like Peter who on the day of Pentecost had all these people wondering what was going on with all the strange noises, and languages, and tongues of fire. And he got up and said "*this is God, and this is what he wants to say to you...*" That day, three thousand people came to believe in Jesus and were baptized.

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Jesus is not pressuring you to go out and stand on a street corner and proclaim the Gospel, but He is asking us to live His Gospel, and to “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:39) Please don’t worry if the message is not received by others, for this is not something new, for Jesus told those 72 what to do if their message was not received. The spiritual battle has been going on since the very beginning. As believers of Jesus Christ, just walk away and continue to lead your life as a Christian, sharing with those who will accept His message. Take confidence that Jesus has given you the authority “*to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.*” (Luke 10:19) Be assured that Jesus is with you and for you; for “*the Kingdom of God is near you!*” (Luke 10:9)