

The Kingdom of God Has Come Near

The Rev. Deacon Lisa Kirby July 3, 2016

In our Gospel lesson Jesus is sending out, not just the twelve, but 70 to go ahead of him to preach, to say The Kingdom of God has come near to you. He is sending them out to Evangelize.

Today, when I go on a trip I pack my bank card, travelers checks, cell phone, clothes, toiletries, an e reader, perhaps a lap top, a GPS, and one bag full of chargers for all those devices.

What does Jesus tell the 70 to take---nothing! No purse, no bag, no travelers checks or bank cards, no sandals. They are to accept and live on whatever hospitality is offered

Jesus also tells them “I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.” Sounds better all the time...

In terms of modern evangelism that means no tent, no laser light show, no fake healings for show, no massive altar call. no passing baskets the size of garbage cans, no autographed prayer cards.

They are to take with them the simple words: “The Kingdom of God has come near”.

I think that Jesus guidance on how they are to behave, to eat what is set before them, and not to stay in a town which doesn’t welcome them, is a way of suggesting that they meet people where they are, as they are.

They are not to make judgments about those who don’t welcome them, just move on. Speak to those who have ears to hear and the courage to do. Don’t just go around grabbing random people and telling them to repent and find Jesus.

I am less than thrilled when someone corners me or rings my door bell wanting to “witness” to me. They have come to “evangelize” but what that means to them is that they want to talk and they want me to listen. True evangelism is not about just words. We are called to proclaim the Gospel in word and in deed. Our forefathers didn’t just sign the Declaration of Independence and then just go out and talk to people about it, actions were required.

If people want to know what it means to be a Christian offer yourself and your faith community to them as an example of a lived Gospel.

It’s nice to invite people to Christ Church and talk about how good the music is, how welcoming everyone is, but also talk about what the people in this place do in response to God’s call. Talk about cooking breakfast at RCS, talk about what Interfaith Refugee Ministries does, talk about Prison Ministry, the Grief Group, contemplative opportunities, tell them that

we are home to AA and NA, that we know how to find joy in serving others. Tell them about how you have found ways to live the Gospel in this place.

Let them know that in this place The kingdom of God comes near.

But we ought not force ourselves on those who are not ready to hear. Be an example, and perhaps they may someday want to know from where your strength comes. I am willing to listen to someone's story, but if it's about coming to believe, but not changing how they live their life, I am not interested. Don't tell me what you've come to believe, tell me how your belief has caused you to act.

When I pronounce the dismissal to go in peace to love and serve the Lord, remember, as I said 2 weeks ago, love is a verb, it means doing something, and when we do something, we are serving the Lord, and serving the Lord is an honor and a joy. Let us rejoice that, in Jesus words, the Kingdom of God continues to come near and our lives will never be the same again.

Amen