



Rev Helen Jacobi

Seventy

Year C Ordinary Sunday 14

Isaiah 66:1-14

Luke 10:1-11

3 July 2022

There are I think about 70 of you here this morning. 70 is a good biblical number. God instructed Moses to gather 70 elders to serve with him (Numbers 11:16) and in today's account Jesus appoints 70 disciples to go ahead of him into the various towns where he is heading.

Like John the Baptist they go to prepare the way.

Maybe they are going to do practical things like find Jesus a place to stay where he can be safe. But Jesus frames the work up as bringing the "kingdom of God" to these places. The kingdom, or realm, or way of being; the Jesus way.

So you 70, as you are sent out, don't get to take a purse (so no money), or a bag (no change of clothes), nor an extra pair of sandals.

You go with nothing in terms of possessions, just yourself, who you are and what you know and have experienced.

Now I don't know about you but when I am travelling I always take too many changes of clothes as you never know what the weather will do or what I might need.

So the thought of heading out with no bag at all is decidedly unappealing.

This makes the disciples dependent on the hospitality of those who will house them.

Jesus makes a real point of this; stay wherever you receive a welcome and don't go from house to house in the hope of a better meal.

Receive hospitality and offer what you know to be true – the kingdom of God has come near.

The disciples don't have to do this alone, they are to travel in pairs. An emphasis on community and being interdependent.

But if they are not welcomed, they don't have to hang around and try and convince people of the merits of Jesus' teaching, they are to move on.

So where are we sent to, we 70?

To our homes, our workplaces, our communities, our whanau.

We take what is most valuable – ourselves and our faith.

Now if you said to a coworker "the kingdom of God has come near" they might think you had lost the plot somewhat.

But there are so many ways that you bring "the way of Jesus" with you into your lives.

We are starting our Telling Our Stories series for this year next week.

This is our opportunity to hear from parishioners something of their life story and something of their approach to faith.

We are so grateful each year for the people who are willing to step up and share something pretty personal.

But even more important is what it sparks in the rest of us.

What connections do we see, what reflections or questions arise for each of us, as we look at our own story and our own faith.

That is a great example of the kingdom of God coming near.

Notice how Jesus doesn't say the kingdom of God is here, definitively and clearly.

It has come near – maybe is slightly elusive, to be sought and explored and wondered about.

Yesterday a group of us went to the Icons exhibition at the Art Gallery.

We had a most interesting and informative time learning about the art of icon writing, the symbols and the history.

But the most interesting part was chatting over lunch, sharing what each person had been drawn to, what our group members had noticed; each one unique.

We certainly had a sense of the kingdom of God drawing near.

But getting back to being sent out, in pairs remember, this is not a solo gig.

Sent to our workplaces, communities and whanau, bringing the way of Jesus with us in the way we approach life and the priorities we choose.

When we are talking with others about caring for the earth, making sure our office is recycling and composting food waste do we say we are concerned about this because our faith teaches us to care for God's earth?

Or is articulating our faith to others still a bit scary?

If we are advocating for a living wage in our company or for good housing conditions as landlords do we say we do this because manaakitanga, hospitality and care of others are tenets of our faith?

Or is articulating our faith to others still a bit scary?

If you hear a family member or colleague making derogatory comments about another person and you quietly call them on it; do you say your faith teachings help you to avoid such mistakes or is articulating our faith to others still a bit scary?

Jesus sends us out on the road with no baggage or money; just ourselves, our companions, and the promise that the kingdom of God, the way of God, is near.

The promise that we can reach into the wealth and depth of our heritage of faith and our community of faith for the support we need.

And the promise that we will be hosted and supported on the way. That there will be a welcome response to our greeting of peace and if there is not it is ok to move on.

But we are still hesitant aren't we?

Still reluctant to share something personal and something we know other people make assumptions about.

To claim Christianity as our faith is to be branded with the failings of so many churches and their bigotry.

To be ashamed of the failings of our own denomination in its history of glacial progress on things like marriage equality.

Can we gain some confidence and claim our own voice and our own space, and not feel weighed down by those things?

Can we shake the dust off our feet and move forward?

In our parish consultation process that is underway at the moment you have all shared wonderful stories of our parish community, things that you cherish and appreciate.

And in our wishes for the future many have also expressed a worry about what the future holds and how we might grow our congregation.

Well the principal way that any congregation grows is when current members invite others to join.

We are lucky that our location and profile does mean that people just turn up to check us out and some stay.

And I know some of you have been brought here by people who were here before you.

And we have plenty of people joining us on the livestream.

There are 70 of you here today – a good biblical number.

Ready to be sent out?

Ready to report back on what you found in God's world?

Ready to declare the kingdom of God has come near?

Ready to invite others on the journey?

70 is all that is needed to begin.