

Proper 8, Yr. A: A Shared Priesthood

Jeremiah 28:5-9; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42

The Reverend Paul D. Allick, The Church of the Advent, June 28, 2020

These past few Sundays we have been reading through the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. It began with Jesus calling the Twelve Apostles.

He then instructs them about the mission he is sending them on. He sends them to go and do as he has been doing: healing, preaching and casting out demons.

He tells them to travel light, to accept hospitality from those they are visiting, and how to know when it is time to shake the dust off of your shoes and move on.

He also warns them of the risks involved in this mission to reconcile all people to God. He warns them that the message will bring division and that they cannot take up this work until they are ready to lose their lives for the sake of it.

Our passage today concludes the instructions and bring them to a succinct point: whoever welcomes you welcomes me. And when they welcome you in my name, they are welcoming the way to get right with God and to receive prophecy.

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me. It brings to mind what I consider to be one of the most crucial instructions in our Catechism:

“The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons.” It then goes on to describe the ministry of each. The first order of ministry for all is to represent Christ and his Church at all times and in all places.

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me. Surely, we all think of this for the ordained ministers. But how often do we think of it for the laity. Do the laity feel the same pressures to represent Christ and the Church or is it a little bit easier for them to hide who they are? Are clergy held to higher standards of public and interpersonal behavior in this regard? And isn't it the job of the clergy to do ministry on behalf of the laity?

Not according to Jesus. In fact, in Luke Chapter 10 he not only sends out the designated twelve leaders. He sends out seventy disciples in pairs. It's the whole body representing Christ and the Gospel every moment of their lives.

I sure preach on this a lot. It must be that it comes up so much in the Gospels!

This theme of shared ministry jumps out at me so often because I know from experience that until each disciple owns this clear call from Jesus the Church will be weak. She will be weak in mission. She will be weak in building up our institutional structures. She will be weak because she is not being who she was called to be.

This is why we must keep this teaching ever before us.

We recalled our goal as a people in our opening prayer, "Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you."

Through our baptism we all share in the royal priesthood of Christ. We are all called to share in the Christian ministry. Yes, we select from our number those we wish to ordain as

priests; the ones who preside, pronounce absolution and blessings; the ministers who do the primary pastoral care and teach the intricacies of the faith. There is no doubt that we need people especially trained and educated but each of us by our baptism is called to share in that ministry.

We can't pick out our presiding priests and then leave them to be *the minister* as has been the habit of the institutional Church. A habit we clergy have fully participated in. In that model we lose our impact on the world and on our own souls. In that model we become just another institution.

In this ordained life the Lord has given me, I've never been interested in being the most powerful minister in the room. I am not so big on being the center of attention. And that suits me well because we are community of disciples gathered around Word and Sacrament, not an audience gathered around a cleric.

We are here building a community of disciples where we all offer our gifts of ministry.

If we are all on the quest to be joined together in unity around the teachings of the apostles and prophets, in the breaking of bread and fellowship, in the ministry of reconciliation, we can't go wrong. We will grow stronger and shine brighter. We will be Christ to those who meet us.