

✠ Luke 10:1-20 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

The seventy or seventy-two preachers are ordained and sent to preach the message of Jesus: the kingdom of God is near. Whenever they preach the Word and are received, there they stay, eating and drinking with those who believe. Those preachers who enter a town that does not believe, where they are not received, wipe the dust from their feet in judgment against that city, and move on until they are received, where they stay and eat and drink with the brothers.

St. Luke records for us what has become and will become of those who reject the message that Jesus sends his preachers to preach. They will suffer a worse punishment than Sodom, a city destroyed by judgment fire, and a worse fate than Tyre and Sidon, cities destroyed by bloodshed and famine. Those who reject the message of the ones sent shall reap a whirlwind of destruction and judgment, damnation and hellfire; a warning to all to repent for the kingdom of God draws near.

For the angels that approached Sodom performed no sign that they might believe and repent, but Sodom itself was made a sign for all creation. But those who have heard the message of Jesus have received the sign, the sign of Jonah, therefore they are held to a stricter judgment than Sodom and a more devastating end than Tyre and Sidon.

But that is for those who do not believe. What of those who believed the message. It is a mystery what became of those who received the seventy-two preachers into their towns and homes. Did they remain in the faith? Did they themselves become missionaries after the resurrection? Did they follow St. Stephan in martyrdom, dying at the hands of men for their faith? Were they great Christian pillars in their communities and churches, beacons of confessionalism and orthodoxy? Interestingly and most pointedly, St. Luke does not record for us what became of those who received the message that the kingdom of God has drawn near.

Why should those who do not believe warrant our Lord's attention, yet those who received Him by receiving those He sent do not even warrant and "atta boy? It is pointed that the lives of those who believed as well as the names of the seventy-two, or even what became of them, is nowhere mentioned in Holy Writ. Church legend tells us that Stephan and Barnabas, Matthias and James the Lesser, Mark and St. Luke himself might have been among the seventy-two, but Scripture is glaringly silent on this point. But this is right, for this way they decrease and Jesus increases. This way, Jesus receives all the glory.

You see, it is our nature to strive to be number one, numero uno, the big cheese. It's not just big-time athletes and politicians that bend or break the rules to make sure their name is in the limelight and that they receive the biggest possible applause and following. We all desire everything to be about us. Even we 'common folk' gossip so as to make ourselves look intelligent and wise compared to the idiot we're gossiping about. We lie to make ourselves look and appear better than we know ourselves to be. If we were big-time movie stars and pop-culture icons, we would fare no better than Paris Hilton or Bill Clinton. Sure, we might

not get caught, at least not by man. But let's face it, not too many of us really fear the One who can destroy both body and soul in the fires of hell. We're more likely to fear our name being smeared by what is usually the truth anyway.

Just about everything we do we do either to hide our foibles from others or to enlarge our fortes that we may seem to be more than we are and better than we are. But this, as St. Paul says, is deception. And while I or your neighbor, or even your wife can't see it, God does. But we don't give it a second thought that those who believed the message and the lives of the seventy-two are not mentioned because we don't think ourselves as just those who believed and are not worthy of mentioning.

We rather interpret Scripture here in a personable light, thinking of ourselves as the seventy-two; the great preachers or evangelists that forsake all for Jesus and go about spreading the Word. We want everyone, including ourselves, to think we're important, that we matter. We want to place ourselves in Scripture, not as Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, but as St. Peter and king David.

But truth be told, those who did not believe are mentioned over and against those who did because while some may believe, everyone disbelieves. Even the Eleven and the seventy-two misplaced their faith in works and miracles rather than in the words and promises of Christ. The Eleven wanted to be first in the kingdom, assuring themselves that they were worthy of such a position, much like those who always see themselves as the hero of Scripture. Yet instead of confessing their doubt and fear, they hid their fear so that they'd look better in front of the others, promising that they would never deny the Lord. But they did.

The seventy-two report back to Jesus full of themselves; that they cast out demons and healed the sick. But Jesus cautions them and rebukes their pride, "Do not rejoice that demons are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." What do you make yourself out to be? The perfect mother? The perfect husband? The perfect church member? The perfect neighbor? The one who everyone should listen to and admire for your great achievements and mental feats? "Oh, no," we say, "I readily admit that I am nothing but a cog in the machine, a small fry," but even in our humility we hope that those listening will think our humility and self-debasement admirable and something to emulate. But who are you fooling?

Here is the scary truth: everyone knows who you are because they know who they are. No one is without sin. All are liars and cheats, gossips and self-worshippers, fornicators and God-haters. You're not fooling anyone but yourself when you pretend that you're beyond petty and public sins, that you're the important one, numero uno, the big cheese.

Repent, for the kingdom of God has come near to you.

Stop thinking that you are more than you are and repent of your sins and idolatry. Stop thinking that you are the spiritual brother that must restore everyone else in their transgressions, and realize that it is you who needs to be restored by Jesus because of your transgressions. Carry your own load. That is, confess your own sins and judge yourself, then you will love your brother more fully because you will see that you are more fully loved.

For that is what it means to believe the message of Jesus' preachers. Peace be on this house! Here is healing for your body and soul; here is the place where those who are sick with guilt and diseased with sin shall be cured. For the kingdom of God has drawn near to you.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is He, the Anointed One of God, the descendant of David. He is approaching you and desires to make His home with you. For the joy set before Him, His Bride, He has set His face toward Jerusalem and will not be turned either to the left or to the right. He will not waiver in purpose nor will He be dissuaded from accomplishing the Father's will.

Do not be caught rejoicing in your own works and piety, your own pride and fortitude, rather rejoice that your name is written in heaven. Such is the rejoicing of those with whom the Lord of Glory stays and eats and drinks with. For it is not mere bread that our Lord gives, but manna from heaven, His very body; and it is not mere wine that our Lord serves, but the river of life, His very blood.

The message is the same. It does not matter if it is received or rejected, believed or ignored; the message is the same: "the kingdom of God has come near to you."

The kingdom of God is indeed upon you.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠