

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday  
7/11/2021

## TWO BY TWO

*He sent them out two by two.* In the gospels, even a small detail can be rich in meaning. *He sent them out two by two.* Why? We don't know. Perhaps it was for mutual support. Sharing God's word can be a difficult task. It can involve push back even from religious leaders as was the case for Amos in the first reading.

Remember that the apostles were a diverse group of men: Peter was impetuous; James and John jockeyed for prestige; Matthew was a tax collector who collaborated with the foreign invading power while Simon was a zealot, a fanatic who wanted to violently overthrow the Romans. What if Matthew and Simon were sent out as a pair? We don't know who went with whom or how those teams of two were chosen but somehow they went forth and somehow they worked together for the common good, for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of Jesus.

In all of that there's a lesson for us. We're different people with different gifts, temperaments, abilities and, let's be honest, a few shortcomings. And yet we're called to follow Christ, not as individuals but as members of a team that we call the Church. Each of us, each in our own way, each in our own vocation and in our own station in life are called, to work together with others for the common good, for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of Jesus. Can it be hard sometimes? Yes. Can it be frustrating? Yes. Can it be something that makes us better, that allows us to grow in holiness and that can even bring joy? Yes.

St. Paul writing to the Ephesians launches into this beautiful hymn of praise to God for God's love to us before the foundation of the world. He says that we are all adopted children of God. He speaks of God's plan to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth. And each of us is called, in our own way to share in that work.

More specifically how do we do that? We do it with lives of intentional faith in every little way. We do it through cultivating a practice of daily prayer in harmony with our state in life. We do it through familiarity with the word of God and through the sacraments, especially through reconciliation, and in a privileged way, through the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. And we do it through following what is set

forth in today's psalm: *Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss.* Kindness, truth, justice and peace.

Kindness isn't just being nice. The Bible doesn't tell us to be nice but it does tell us to be kind. To be kind originally meant to be natural, to act with family-like affection, while to be cruel is dehumanizing. Kindness makes us more human.

Biblically, truth isn't just an abstract concept, it's the process of being faithful, of being true. It's fidelity. People lie because they are afraid of the truth but lying, in addition to being wrong, can eat away at our emotional energy. Although truth can be harder in the short term, in the long run it pays off to be truthful. Jesus says, *I am the truth* and one way that we show we are his disciples is by living lives of truth.

Justice means being faithful in our relationships which leads us to ask, with whom are we in relationship? Well, God, our family, our friends and neighbors, and as Christians we would say with everyone; including the poor needy and even our enemies.

Peace or in Hebrew, *Shalom*, is more than the absence of war or conflict. Shalom is blessing, wholeness, completeness, harmony and the presence of an order intended by God and we would go so far as to say it's the presence of him whom we call the Prince of Peace.

And there's something else we can learn from all of this. Jesus sends the apostles out telling them to travel lightly. They're not to carry excess baggage that would distract them from their mission. Obviously, Jesus is talking about visible, excess physical baggage which is something that can slow us down as well. But there's also invisible, excess emotional baggage that can slow us down such as, resentment, nursing grudges, bitterness, cynicism, anger, pride, entitlement and the like, can also distract us from our mission. These can slow us down and impede the work of God in our lives as we strive to follow Christ every day. To let go of these, and it may take time, not only will help us in our mission, but will make us happier people.

*He sent them out two by two.* They were to work together for the sake of Christ and we are to do the same. We too are called to be part of this challenging, glorious work through our lives. This involves working with other people, people we may not

necessarily have chosen ourselves but who in one sense have been given to us. Through kindness, truth, justice and peace, through freeing ourselves of excess baggage whether physical or emotional, we strive with lives of intentional faith, like the apostles mission, to do our part to sum up all things in Christ.