

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9C)

July 3, 2016

Text: Luke 10:1–20

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If you could strip away all the external fixtures of the Church so that you could see clearly without any distractions, what would you find? Revelation 1 answers that question in a unique way. The apostle John saw a vision of the glorified Lord Jesus standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands while holding seven stars in His right hand. Rev. 1:20 says, “As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” The Church is simply the Lord Jesus living in the midst of His beloved people guiding them through the ministry of His pastors, preachers, and teachers. What stands behind every true worship service, behind every true ministry, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He’s the heart and center of everything that’s taking place here today and every Sunday, rather, every worship service. The holy Christian Church is God’s people living in, with, and under the authoritative presence of Jesus.

We see a similar picture of the Lord’s Church in the gospel reading from Luke 10. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus sends out seventy-two preachers in advance of where the Lord will be traveling (vs. 1). Already in the first verse we should notice that the 72 don’t go out on their own initiative, on their own authority. They are sent out by Jesus even as Jesus was sent out by the Father to save the world. Jesus makes that conclusion explicit in vs. 16, “The one who hears you (i.e., 72 preachers) hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

The Divine Son of God just didn’t up and decide one day to become incarnate of the Virgin Mary, suffer under Pontius Pilate, die by crucifixion, and rise from the dead on the third day. Jesus was sent by His Father with His authority to accomplish His Father’s will. As the Father sent the Son to accomplish His loving will for the world, so Jesus sends preachers out into the world to proclaim God’s love in Christ. The 72 in Luke 10, the stars held in Jesus’ hand in Revelation 1.

Our Lutheran Confessions take this truth very seriously. The Augsburg Confession, our chief confession of faith, says “Our churches teach that nobody should preach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless he is regularly called” (AC XIV). I don’t stand here every Sunday on my own authority. I have been called by Christ through the Church to preach, teach, and administer the Sacraments on behalf of this congregation at the sending of and in the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus said, “the one who hears you (the called and sent ones, the 72 and every subsequent called and sent pastor, preacher, missionary, evangelist, etc) hears me (Jesus). . .”

Every worship service is the hearing and receiving of Jesus! That’s the miraculous character of each and every worship service. The Lutheran Church has been very bold in its teaching that when the called ministers of Christ preach rightly, the living voice of Jesus is being heard; when called ministers baptize, Jesus is baptizing; (*i.e., Jesus baptized Blake this morning!*) when called ministers absolve sinners, Jesus is forgiving sins; when called ministers administer the Lord’s Supper according to Christ’s command and promise, Jesus Himself is giving His body and blood. Only in the Church, can the authoritative, saving presence of Jesus be found with confidence and certainty.

And there’s urgency in the sending out of called ministers, the 72. Vs. 2, “And Jesus said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’” The work is urgent. The harvest is reading. So the Church cannot stop calling pastors, cannot stop sending out missionaries, cannot stop witnessing to the saving love and truth of God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each members of Christ’s Church does his or her part until the harvest work of evangelism is done. We don’t all have the same task. But we do have work to do. Not every Christian is a pastor, preacher, teacher, or evangelist. And yet, every Christian prays. So pray, says Jesus, for more laborers, for more called men called by Christ for the express purpose of working in the harvest. Have you ever encouraged a young man to think about being a pastor, missionary, teacher, or evangelist? Encourage, pray, and support men as they consider this calling of gospel ministry.

There is danger however; the task is not easy. Jesus said to the 72, “I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves” (vs. 3). Jesus goes to Jerusalem as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. His called servants follow the same path.

And the conditions of service are, well, unique. “Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road” (vs. 4). This is no pleasure excursion, no vacation for the 72. The urgency is too great. God’s kingdom is at hand. The Lord’s Passion, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension to the Father’s right hand are about to take place. The message must be proclaimed.

And what do they preach? “Peace be to this house” (vs. 5) and “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (vs. 9). The Lord’s Church and her ministry are one of peace and new life in God’s kingdom. This is the on-going moment by moment, year after year work of Christ’s Church. In the sending of the 72, Jesus is establishing how His Church will work and what she will preach until the end of time.

The problem only arrives when the message is rejected. Jesus warns of that too. Whole towns, it appears in vs. 10, might reject the message of Christ’s Church. The dust of the town is swept off the disciples’ feet and they move on. God’s kingdom came near. The only reason they weren’t part of God’s kingdom is they refused His invitation. Jesus issues a stern warning in vs. 13–15. This is no child’s play. To reject the message of the 72, of called pastors, teachers, preachers, apostles, and evangelists is to reject Jesus, is to reject the Father Almighty. We mustn’t forget the other side of vs. 16, “the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

According to Jesus, wicked Sodom will find more mercy in the Day of Judgment than the towns which reject the message of the Gospel. Fire and brimstone destroyed those inhabitants because they refused the preaching of Lot. The judgment will be worse for those refuse the Church for they are refusing Jesus, the Son of the Father.

This should cause us some pause. What makes refusing Christ’s messengers so bad is not that this sin is quantifiably worse than other sins but that it refuses Christ’s forgiveness. It rejects the Father’s love in the sending of the Son which love is extended in the sending of the 72 and other called servants of Christ. I’m sometimes asked if some sins are worse than others. The answer is yes. The worst sin, however, is unbelief. For it rejects God’s desire to love and save the sinner.

The 72 go out under the command and authority of Jesus. Vs. 17 records their triumphant return, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” You can feel the exuberance in those words. Can we feel the pain in the Lord’s response (vs. 18), “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” Yes, dear 72, you fulfilled your

work beautifully. Forgiveness came to broken lives. My Father's kingdom was extended. Through it all, Satan was defeated, cast out of heaven, thrown down in ignominious defeat.

This Satan was once called Lucifer, bringer of light; archangel of archangels, the highest creation in the angelic order. His rebellion and sin now make him Satan, accuser and adversary. Jesus cautions the 72 and His Church not to rejoice in the fall of Satan and his evil minions. The forgiveness of sins given in Word and Sacrament in this miraculous setting defeats Satan, overcomes the fallen world, and subdues our sinful flesh. That's pretty powerful stuff.

But our rejoicing is not to be found in the exercise of Christ's authority.

"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (vs. 20). Rejoice in that God's peace rests upon you through the forgiveness of your sins. Rejoice in the Holy Spirit and in living in God's glorious kingdom. Names of loved and forgiven sinners are written in heaven. (*Blake's name was written down in heaven this day!*) Let us ever find joy in that eternal gift! The living Lord Jesus stands behind it all.

That's what the Church is, dear saints of God. Jesus dwelling among His beloved people. What a glorious gift is given to us through the Lord Jesus!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.