FINDING OUR PLACE IN GOD'S WORK

St Luke's Day – 18th October 2020 > Luke 10v1-9

This reading is appropriate on what the church has designated St Luke the Evangelist's Day. Here we have a portion of Scripture unique to Luke; 72 people sent here and there in the name and carrying the authority of Jesus. They were heralds of good news, making clear Jesus was about visit the communities they went into and what people should expect when he arrived. I want to highlight 3 things that may cause us to re-think our distinctive contribution as Christians today.

a) **We are shown something significant about the designation apostle**.

If all we had was the record in Luke 9 of Jesus commissioning and sending out the 12 as preachers and healers, we might be excused in assuming that's the bespoke and distinctive work of the few who were or are apostles. Because 72 others now do what the first 12 are recorded as doing in chapter 9, being an "apostle" was not about only a few people getting to do what people had seen and experienced from Jesus.

Mark reinforces this conclusion in 16v15-18.

A role of the apostles designated by Jesus was to be trailblazers – in winning new converts and then teaching them to heal sick people for whom medical science had no cure, bringing freedom to those tormented by demons and doing miracles as part of everyday life.

Thereafter the question becomes "Have you believed and been baptised?" If so, we have the potential and a responsibility to do the same things. A few will be apostles, but all are to be apostolic.

b) **We are shown something striking about prayer** in our identification with Jesus and his ministry.

In chapter 6 we find Jesus spent a whole night praying, and in the morning called out 12 among his larger group of disciples, then designated them as apostles. Only later did they go out on their first ministry venture; they were chosen before they were commissioned.

In chapter 9 we see Jesus retreats up a mountain, again to pray but this time with 3 of the apostles with him; when he returns, he has to set about clearing up a number of messes made by and addressing misapprehensions rampant among his disciples. At the start of chapter 10, having identified another 72 to do things similar to the 12, the first thing they are instructed to do is to pray for God to raise up more workers to join them in the same task. They set about God's work after learning to wrestle with Him about the need for more and subsequent generations to follow in their footsteps.

Prayer, sometimes intensely and with no little sacrifice involved, is a vital preparation for and springboard into new initiatives or seasons of concerted effort; and taking a responsible approach to ensuring God's work grows when our time to step back comes. It was important for Jesus, he modelled it alongside his disciples and then instructs us to pray , often before we know what to do; rather than simply asking God to bless what we have already decided to do.

c) **We are shown something startling about the resources we need** in order to do new things, and to be reactionaries always with something of heaven to offer!

Jesus asked his followers in ministry to be marked by simplicity, to operate on the basis of faith their needs would be supplied and use the principle of welcome or otherwise as a key sign as to whether they stay or move on from one place to another. They were to step out rather than waiting until the supply lines were visible and in place. The readiness to know God has called us and act confident He will meet needs is part of the cost of being a disciple. It's the "new-normal" when we are born again (see John 3v1-15).

This point is emphasised at the end of Luke 24, after the resurrection as Jesus is about to ascend. Jesus reminds his followers the baton for the kingdom is now to pass from him to them. One thing only they need: they are to stay in Jerusalem "u*ntil … clothed with power from on high*." (24v49) Nothing here about passports, visas, travel money, insurance and equipment to hand.

2020 has forced us to abandon many of our best-laid plans and everyday assumptions; even so we don't need to think the virus has won. Through reading and listening to just this small portion of scripture today, let's get back to the basics in terms of living from our identity rather than on the back of any self-made sense of security. Luke probably modelled this himself. He was a medical doctor but - as a result of becoming a follower of Jesus - became known for his identification with Apostle Paul and his ministry. 2020 can become the year when the real meaning of Christmas comes to the fore again.

Equally, this is not calling people away from the ordinary work of professional occupations business and industry. There is no reason to think Luke stopped being a doctor; rather a doctor who went beyond the confines of training and work-station, to do the work and works of God's kingdom. Part of our contribution to getting through and coming out the other side of this pandemic is to be people who do our regular work AND convey God's good news, healing the sick who have been given no hope or lasting relief, marked by miracles; because we make step-changes in how we do life, on the basis of pursuing God's wisdom in prayer, living and acting from faith.

Jesus was the master in drilling these things down very practically. For example, In terms of material things, he put it like this in Matthew 6v33:
" … s*eek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*"

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