

St. Bride's Church of Scotland, Newtonmore

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THE SENDING

4th Nov 2018

Luke 9:1-6, 10-11
2 Timothy 4:1-5

In the month of October we were looking at some of what Luke shows us about Jesus being a catalyst. We saw how he both attracted and repelled people, and how he got their attention and how, at the end of that, the first stage of his ministry, he called his twelve disciples to follow him. A catalyst is something which changes the norm, shakes things up, disrupts expectation, and Jesus was an effective catalyst.

The next stage of his ministry we see him at work with the disciples, mainly with the twelve, but sometimes with a smaller or larger group, and now he is functioning as a coach. Not a posh bus, but a person who helps people to do things, to make changes, to take up challenges. If in the first stage the disciples were those who watched Jesus, in the second stage of his ministry they were encouraged, at times, to have a go themselves, and in between those efforts, their teaching was aimed at helping them see the need for action and the way that action in Jesus name must be undertaken. The catalyst who drew people's attention by being different from the way of the world, wasn't going to go back to doing things in the expected way.

(We will not be taking incidents in strict order, the way Luke sets them out, mainly because we have to accommodate Remembrance Sunday next week.)

Today we read about the first time that Jesus sent his twelve disciples out to try doing his kind of work on their own. They were given power over demons – the things, seen and unseen, that torment people and break lives apart - and given power to heal physical ailments. And so, equipped to make people whole in mind and body they were sent to give the spiritual message that this was the kingdom, or reign of God. They weren't given too much time to worry or to prepare. In fact Jesus didn't want them to spend long in getting ready – or what we tend to think of as ready.

When we are preparing for something, it seems that the longer we have, the more we find we need to do. The more "what ifs" and contingencies we feel we have to prepare for. We so often think of the things we need, or might need. And the result is that we pack too much when we go on a trip – well, don't we? Have you ever gone on holiday and realised that half the things you have in your case are not needed and you could get along just fine without them? Things that you bring "just in case". The disciples were not to take things just in case. They were to be free of having to worry about non-essentials. Which, when you think about it, is a wonderful freedom!

"Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic." Now that is packing light! They were to go just as they were. The point was, of course, that they were to depend on God. They were to depend on God for the power to do their ministry and so, maybe as a reminder of that, they were to

depend on God for their physical needs as well. They were told to stay in the homes that they entered – trusting God that there would be people ready and willing to welcome them in. Although that welcome wasn't guaranteed, because Jesus also told them what to do if they came to a place where no one wanted to know them. They were to leave, not hang around hoping, pleading, trying again. How often we waste time on the unwilling, thinking that because something "worked" once or "worked" somewhere else it must work again for us. There will always be people who do not want to hear, and if we find that these are the people we have been targeting then we should move on and find the ones who are willing and eager to hear. They are out there! The disciples were assured that there were people who wanted to hear them, who needed their message and ministry, and they were to move on to find them.

So off they went, through the villages. Luke leaves it up to us to think about how they may have felt about this. Were they terrified? Excited? Impatient? Intrigued? Eager? Reluctant? There were probably at least twenty-four different reactions among the twelve of them! Here they are, they have been intrigued by Jesus, have begun following him around, have been chosen to be part of the inner twelve. They have seen him teach and heal, calm storms and drive out demons and even raise from the dead – just before this was the incident when Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus. Watching, being close to the action is fun and can feel important – so long as nothing is asked of you. Most people like to hang around with someone who is popular and attracting attention, who is doing amazing things. Most people like others to see that they are near the centre of the action. But Jesus doesn't call disciples just to watch. He didn't then, and he doesn't now. He calls his disciples to act in his name and in his way. So off they went.

How did it go for them? We don't know. This is the story of Jesus, not of his disciples. So we don't know if they all found places to accept them, and if they had the courage to speak or to try to heal. We know some of them did, because Luke tells us. We don't know if they came back feeling on top of the world or like abject failures. But Jesus sent them, and they went, and this means that as they went and when they come back, however they *felt*, even if things had not worked out as they had hoped or envisaged, they were certainly not failures, because – and this is crucial – they went. They were sent, and they went.

Very often we can be paralysed in our Christian service because we are afraid that when we try things, when we speak to people, when we invite people to come with us to church or somewhere else we won't get the results we hope for. We decide in our minds what success and failure look like. Success, we think, is when you are able to speak to someone and they are struck by your words and agree that you have changed and transformed their lives. Success is when you issue an invitation and ten, if not twenty people come with you to church. Success is when you pray for someone and they are completely and instantly transformed, healed of whatever harmed them.

OK, I maybe exaggerate, but there's a grain of truth there for many of us. And yet, when you think about it, that kind of success has a lot in common with what the world thinks. And it was not the kind of success that Jesus had. Yes, he was able to attract disciples and crowds, but many of them turned against him or deserted him, and he ended up put to death on a trumped-up charge. In this story about the twelve being sent out, we are not told what kind of success they had. When the disciples come back we are just told that "They told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida." He took them off for a

quiet conversation about their experiences, for what we would call debriefing. (Or that was the plan, the crowds had other ideas.) He took them off with the intention of talking it all over and helping them learn from their experiences, of showing them the deeper things that were going on whether they were being welcomed or leaving shaking the dust from their feet. What they had done was important for those to whom they had gone, but it was even more important for them. They had tried something, and now they had to learn from it.

As we seek to be Jesus' disciples, we should remember that he also sends us. He sends us with words and deeds that are healing and full of the love of God, because the kingdom of God is found in us and spreads through us. In Jesus' service the messengers are at least as important as the message, because the message is embodied in the messengers – in you and me. He sends us, and so it is when we go that we have done what he asks. Of course, it is great when our going means that God's love and God's word find a home with someone, and that lives are touched by our going. Of course we need to be wise, as the twelve had to be, and not waste our time banging on and on to someone who really does not want to know – that kind of thing can be very counter-productive. But our obedience *and our success* is in the going. Not in the result.

If we feel that God wants us to speak a word of his love to a person, then the success is when the word is spoken. If we feel we are being asked to invite someone to church, then it is in the giving of the invitation that we are successfully doing God's work. The response is God's business. And, just as the twelve had, we have each other to come back to and tell of what we have done and what has happened. We have each other to share our difficulties with and to help each other to keep learning from our service and keep doing what we believe God is asking of us. No one is asked to do this alone. We need each other.

Each of us is called to do the work of a disciple in different ways. Some of us are called to speak more and others to act more. Some are called to pray fervently. All of us are called to have the kingdom of God in our lives, to know and show that God is in charge in our lives at all times, whatever we are doing and wherever we go. If we are Christians, God's Spirit lives within us, and we can no more turn that off, than we can stop breathing.

So let's not burden ourselves with baggage, with what ifs, and things to worry about. Let's not burden ourselves with our own ideas of success. We are called to follow Jesus in freedom, free of burdens, alive to the prompting of God's Spirit, and living the life of love and joy that he gives us for all to see. Our success is in the going, in the living in the loving. And our need is for each other to be there with Jesus to help us grow. Amen.

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