

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

1 July, 2007

1. **Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.** (Luke 9. 51-62). At this stage we could almost describe Jesus as overzealous about his determination to go to Jerusalem where he knew death awaited him. This singular vision upset the people from one Samaritan village. Would-be disciples were told straight how tough going with Jesus was—no time for establishing a home, no time for social customs and family obligations. No place for someone who wasn't as dedicated as he. Becoming a disciple was certainly hard-going! Where was Jesus' compassion? Wasn't he supposed to be compassionate (or meek and mild as the child's prayer goes)? This is a side of Jesus we don't often want to think about.
2. **Elisha showed the dedication required** of a disciple. (2 Kings 2.1-2, 11-20). . Elisha understood that he was Elijah's successor and persisted with him until Elijah was carried into heaven. Because he was loyal , a double portion of his spirit was bestowed on Elisha No doubt none of this story was wasted on Jesus' disciples. Remember some had thought Jesus was Elijah. The disciples may have even compared the request to that of John and James about their future reward.
3. **What is it to be a disciple?** Sharing the vision and energy, commitment and passion, persistence and loyalty, obedience and suffering. Yes, all of these. Yet Paul's words to the Galatians (5.1, 13-25) cast them in a new light. Discipleship is not slavery but freedom. Freedom from restricting laws, freedom from trying to please God by good works, freedom from fleshly desires. Conversely, it is freedom to love, freedom to do what we want to do, because we will want to please God by loving and serving each other, and so inheriting eternal life. St Augustine once said, "Love God and do as you please" for it will please you to be loving. True freedom is found in service.
4. **Sometimes Jesus' harsh words can frighten a believer;** but don't be deterred. They were said to make a point about the imperative of his mission. We must balance these with his other words and actions where he restored people to their families, where he sent people about their normal life rejoicing in health, where he found time to eat with friends. There is only one law and all else can be interpreted by it, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

8 July, 2007

1. **The urgency that Jesus felt** in his drive to Jerusalem continues in this account of the Mission of the Seventy. (Luke 10.1-24) The demands of Jesus on his missionaries seem great, the tolerance for those who do not hear and believe is low. Mission seems such a hard thing! There are many things we could say about this passage.
 - The number 70 represents the church's mission to the nations of the world (then believed to be 70 or 72)
 - They share in Jesus' mission. The message about the kingdom is the same gospel which Jesus was preaching. It was not their mission about Jesus but Jesus' mission about God's Kingdom
 - It is a mix of urgency and detachment. The missionaries were sent with a sense of imperative, yet they were not to be disheartened by those who did not respond. They were not responsible for the decisions of those who would not listen.
 - They were sent with few resources and little preparation. After all, it was the Lord's mission. The missionaries returned elated by their success but Jesus dampened their self-congratulation. The mission was Jesus' cause, not theirs; the success was his not their own achievement.
2. **Jesus still sends us out.**
 - He invites us to share in his mission,
 - We must trust and obey, and be reliant on Jesus' in the midst of hardship and pressure.
 - It's still a kingdom message, helping people to understand where God is active in the world, helping people to gain health and wholeness, overcoming evil.
 - The praise and glory belong to God and not us in success. There will be some who do not respond.
 - Fear of lack of resources or training need not constrain us, for we rely on God.
 - We are blessed if we can be partners in Jesus' mission and see the activity which is the Kingdom of God.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

29 July, 2007

1. **Even today, people say, 'Teach us to pray'** and the question of how we ask and what we ask for in prayer is always quite contentious. John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray (perhaps in repentance) and the disciples were seeking Jesus' views (Luke 11.1-13)
2. **Father (Abba), is the familiar address of a child to his dad.** Other Jews would have shrunk from such intimacy but it shows Jesus' unique consciousness of his relationship as Son. Matthew adds 'in heaven' probably to be more formal in worship. "hallowed be your name" glorifies God, a statement such as this always used in Jewish prayer before the petition/s.. Then come the petitions: "your kingdom come" looks forward to the time when the whole earth will come under Christ's reign; "give us each day our daily bread" (literally *tomorrow's* bread) a taste of the future banquet in the kingdom to come. These are prayers for the foretaste of the blessings to come in the end of time. 'Forgive us our sins...' likewise looks forward to our judgement when continuing in God's forgiveness is conditional on our continuing to forgive others. And finally, 'do not bring us to the time of trial' is for our preservation during the last judgement, anticipated in the trials faced by a Christian in this life. The Lord's Prayer does not deal with the trivialities of life but indeed with our salvation and state of grace in this life and the world to come.
3. **Luke takes the opportunity** to continue with our Lord's teaching on our relationship with God as a loving father whose children can approach him in need and who will meet their requests with love. Petitionary prayer is anchored in the needs of the present being a foretaste of the promises to come.—a taste of the kingdom with its satisfaction, forgiveness and salvation. Perhaps the supreme petition is for the gift of the Spirit. In Baptism, Confirmation and Ordinations and in each Eucharist we invoke the gift of the Spirit, knowing that God's promises for the future will be given today as well as at the end of time.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
22 July, 2007

1. **The domestic scene** of Jesus in the house with Martha and Mary is one most people resonate with in some way. Am I a Martha or a Mary? The truth is that most people combine Mary and Martha's attitude, hearing God speak to them and being with him, and then going out in service, actively working for the Lord in a variety of ways. If this were the only account we had of Martha we would have a very different understanding of her than the one we have. But we can also see her in John's gospel where we are told that Jesus loves her and Mary and we hear her proclaim Jesus as the messiah. (John 11).
2. **This little story** may have been placed in this position in Luke's gospel to balance the story of the good Samaritan. Jesus had told the lawyer that he would live if he acted as a neighbour. It sounds a bit like 'good works'; but being active in the world in good works stems from hearing the word of God and doing it. Listening to God is a priority in our lives, for from hearing God speak to us we gain direction for our lives and challenge to do those things for and with others that will be Christ's action in the world. In the prayer of the day we invite Jesus into our daily lives, into our home and work places. Even in these places we can be "attentive to [Jesus'] voice and ... alert to [his]presence."
3. **How do we listen to God?** How do we hear the voice of Jesus? By spending time with him in prayer and meditation, by careful reading of the Scriptures, by hearing God speak in his Christian community, by bending our will to be God's will, and listening to the cries of those in need and the challenges of prophets. By seeking to obey his command to love God and love our neighbours as ourselves, and being attuned to the mind of Christ, we will hear his word loud and clear.
4. **So, sometimes,** the call will be to come aside to spend time with God, to pray, to listen, to adore. At other times what will be required of us will be proclamation of Jesus as Lord, loving service expressed in hospitality, generosity, a listening ear, a co-operative spirit and fairness to all. And at other times it will be involvement in words and actions of mercy and justice. May we treasure God's word and put it into action.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
15 July, 2007

1. **Love of God and love of neighbour are intimately related in one law.** It is a compilation of laws from Deuteronomy and Leviticus and it is an essential tenet of the Christian faith stemming from Jesus himself. There can be no love of God which does not express itself in the concrete action of loving neighbour. Conversely there is no authentic love of neighbour which does not stem from love of God, otherwise it is a subtle form of self-love or self-interest.
2. **In Matthew and Mark, Jesus' gives this new law** but in Luke 10.25-37 Jesus elicits this response from the lawyer and engages in debate which brings out Jesus' memorable parable. The Samaritan proved himself to be a neighbour. He did not pretend the suffering man wasn't there. He did not pity him from afar. He did not have noble sentiments about him. He actually put himself out to do something practical. He got involved. He gave his time and money. He included others in his care. He maintained his support.
3. **Neighbourliness is a quality demanded of Christians.** We do not choose our neighbours. They are there. They are suffering by the side of the same road we are walking down. TV and global communications have brought neighbours from afar into our homes. They are not necessarily like us. They may not even be from our part of the world. They may not share our values or religious or political beliefs. We cannot choose to avoid them, choose to pretend they are not there, choose to walk on the other side. We are called to respond with whatever resources we have, to show mercy, despite any personal cost.
4. **What does this say to us about being neighbourly** to others in our town and in Australia, to our PNG, Pacific and Asian neighbours, to the people of Darfur in the Sudan and of Zimbabwe, to HIV/AIDS sufferers, to refugees, to those who have been stripped and robbed and beaten by the chances of geography and history? How does this parable colour our understanding of the Church's mission? How do you and your congregation show that you love your neighbour as yourself?