

# *The Kingdom of God has Come Near*

Pentecost VI – Year C – July 4, 2010

Christ Episcopal Church, Poughkeepsie, NY

2 Kings 5:1-14✠Psalm 30✠Galatians 6: 7-16✠Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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*God of the journey – may we come to know, in all times and in all places, that you have called each of us to the harvest. That we are to pack lightly for our journey. And that we are proclaim peace to all that we meet along the way. Amen.*

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Peace. That is the message that we are charged to carry. You may remember that last week when Jesus sent two of his followers on ahead, to prepare for his arrival at village in Samaria, they were rejected. The disciples James & John were prepared to call down fire from heaven. Jesus rebuked that notion. There is no retribution, no violence, and no vengeance. How could there be retribution, violence or vengeance when the message is *The Kingdom of God has come near to you?* The anticipated visit to the Samaritan village – ended before it could even begin. But even for that

village, we know from today's lesson that the message from Jesus is the same: *The Kingdom of God has come near to you.* Last week's side-trip to the Samaritan village marked the beginning of the great journey. The journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. The journey of Jesus towards his ultimate goal. That journey that is the model for our own pilgrimage, towards *our* ultimate goal.

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In this morning's reading from Luke's gospel we are given our marching orders. ***We are told that this is a journey that is made within a community.*** Jesus did not send his friends out on their own. Ministry is not a solo act.

The ministry of the gospel in this place is best accomplished within a community. There is a great deal that can be accomplished when we work together. Any task or ministry that we undertake by ourselves is a risky proposition. When we think that we can work alone we put ourselves at risk for

several things: We can reach burn-out all too quickly, and then become resentful that others aren't working as hard as we do. It is entirely possible that instead of burn-out the task or project that we undertake as a solo act, will be successful and prosper. When that is the case we are at risk of the sin of pride.

***This is a journey that is made within a community.***

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***We are told that this is a journey upon which there will be abundant work, abundant tasks, abundant opportunities.***

A harvest that is plentiful, but for which there are few laborers. There will always be unmet human needs in our communities. There will always be people like you and me who are in need of pastoral care and concern. There will always be children to be nurtured and young people to be mentored. In place like this, there will always be slate to repair, mortar to re-point, grass to mow, and windows to clean. All the more reason to take this journey together in community.

***This is a journey upon which there will be abundant work, abundant tasks, abundant opportunities.***

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***We are told that this is a journey that is best made when we travel lightly.***

As I continue along the way on my own journey this is a lesson that I need to learn over and over again. The accumulation of possessions soon becomes as much of a curse as it does a blessing. Beginning in 1994, when I moved to North Africa, I relocated 13 times. After moving to Poughkeepsie in 2006, I moved six times more times, before settling into the Rectory at the 7<sup>th</sup> move.

One thing I've learned after those 20-some moves: I've got too much 'stuff.' We all likely have too much stuff.

And I'm not talking only about the stuff in boxes and closets, basements, attics and garages. It's not a very far stretch to draw an analogy between the material stuff in our cardboard boxes, and the spiritual & emotional stuff that drag along through our lives.

***This is a journey that is best made when we travel light.***

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***We are told that this is a journey that must always begin in peace.***

First say – *Peace to this house.* To the extent that we are able to do so, that is an incredible frame or boundary within which to live and practice our lives.

The gift of peace to our children in Sunday school each week, to the children who attend Summer Camp. To make sure they know that God's best desire for them is that they can grow and mature to adulthood in peace.

The gift of peace to the men and women who we encounter in the work of the Dutchess Collaborative Reentry Project.

Those folks that we meet in prison or jail, or as they make their way to the 'outside' and try to establish a new life in a civil society.

To let them know that the peace that passes all understanding is available to them, even in the darkest of times.

The gift of peace to those whose spouse, or child, or a friend have died. Their journey, for the time being is one of sadness and grief. To think otherwise would be foolish and unhelpful to say the least. But even so, at those times when our lives are at their saddest, and when we are most in grief, our hearts are closely held to the heart of God. A place where *Peace to this house* has infinite and eternal meaning.

*This is a journey that must always begin in peace.*

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*We are told that this is a journey that brings us close to the kingdom of God.*

It's fascinating that this is the message for those who accept the messengers of Jesus, as well as for those who reject him.

- *When you enter a town and they welcome you, say to them: the kingdom of God has come near to you.*
- *When you enter a town and they do not welcome you, say to them: the kingdom of God has come near to you.*

This is a wonderful and telling message for all of us engaged in ministry. It's *not all about us*.

It's not even about whether we fail or succeed. It's about the message: *The Kingdom of God has drawn near*.

In our personal lives, and within our lives in this community, we will spend time on the mountaintop of success. And we will all walk through that valley that we know from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

We must avoid the trap of beginning to think that it is our own experiences that validate the kingdom of God. Luke tells

us today that the message is the same and is equally valid, whether the villages accept the followers of Jesus, or if they are rejected. It's about the message – not about us as the messengers.

*This is a journey that brings us close to the kingdom of God.*

- A journey that is made in community
- A journey with an abundance of opportunity.
- A journey best made when we travel light.
- A journey that must always begin in peace.
- A journey that brings us close to the kingdom of God.

Our journey today, as a parish community, is to step into the sandals of those first followers of Jesus. It is our task to bring that message to the communities where we live, and move, and have our being. And – in doing so – to also keep that message alive in our own hearts, in our own lives, in our own souls.

We have our own journey to make towards Jerusalem.

We need to go there together.

We'll find plenty to do along the way.

We need to pack lightly.

We need to go in peace.

And along the way, we'll likely be surprised to find that the kingdom of God has drawn near.