

2 Kings 5: 1-14
Gal. 6: 7-16
Luke 10: 1 – 11, 16-20
7 Pentecost, Proper 9

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“In God’s Name”

When Jesus sent those seventy followers out ahead of him to teach and preach and heal, they were sent without much help. They were nobodies, strangers to the people they were to assist, and had so little help or support that they had no purse, no bag, no sandals. They had no handlers, no assistants, no advance people, no drivers, and no entourage. They had no Internet, no texting, no Twitter, and no other mysterious social media program I never heard of. It seems like an astonishing act of bravado or sheer foolishness to think that this program would be successful. The smart money would have bet on complete failure – a major fail, to use today’s popular misuse of language. This should have been a major fail followed by Jesus being voted out of office for his temerity and/or stupidity. Rather like Mr. Cameron and his Brexit gamble. Smart people would have done this all quite differently if they had been even interested in trying to change the social order of a people, stiff-necked Jewish malcontents by all accounts, and a people suffering under the domination of Roman overlords. Who could possibly envision this rag-tag tiny group of peasants taking on the greatest military and political power in the known world and winning? How many times in history have such impossibly ill-suited efforts to overturn injustice or wrong-doing or other man-made disasters been even remotely successful? Doesn’t everyone know that you can’t fight City Hall? Or can one take on “the powers that be” and make great changes in the world without having an army, or unlimited funds, or engaging in terror and violence, or unending slander and crude insults? It turns out that one person, seized with a great idea and willing to sacrifice much, can move an entire society into a new way of being.

William Tyndale is not a household name these days. Yet, as English speaking and reading Christians, we all owe him an enormous debt for his astonishing work in translating the Bible into English. He paid a great price for that mission – he was executed and burned at the stake for heresy – the heresy of translating the Bible into English. He was of minor nobility, with a family that could send him to Oxford to study for the priesthood. He was a gifted linguist, becoming fluent over the years in French, Greek, Hebrew, German, Italian, Latin, Spanish, and, most importantly, extraordinarily gifted in English. Tyndale had chafed at the restrictions on reading Scripture in college, complaining that “no man shall look on the Scriptures until he be noselled in heathen learning eight or nine years.” Sometime in his formative years, he was seized with the call to translate all of Holy Scripture into English such that, the boy that driveth the plow will know more Scripture than a parish priest. No one supported his desire and many actively opposed him. His efforts were publicly condemned as heresy and he was declared a heretic by the church in 1529. He was betrayed by a colleague, imprisoned, tried, and finally strangled and burned at the stake in 1536. Four years later, four translations of the Bible into English were published in England, at the King’s behest – the same King who urged Tyndale’s death.

Tyndale’s translation is considered to comprise almost 85% of the New Testament of the King James Bible and about 75% of the Old Testament. Tyndale gave us words such as “Passover”

and “scapegoat.” He also gave us biblical phrases like, “knock and it shall be opened unto you,” “a moment in time,” ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find,” live, move and have our being.” His mastery of English language, metaphor, and idioms have influenced writers and thinkers for generations – even when they were or are unaware of his existence. But Tyndale was a lamb sent into the midst of wolves. The wolves who rejected him caused him to flee, to live as a nomad with no place to lay his head in safety. Like Paul, Tyndale boasted of nothing except the cross of Christ crucified and risked everything to bring the Word of God to the peasant, the milk girl, and the boy at the plow. He was given authority by the church, but more importantly, he was given rich gifts of language and interpretation and understanding which he used to spread the Good News of God in Christ far wider than it could have been imagined. That sentence of Jesus rings now as loudly as it did then – “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” Tyndale took seriously his call to ordained sacramental ministry and the spread of the Good News. Like Paul, he worked for the good of all, even at the cost of his life.

Walt and Milly Woodward occupy similar territory. As editors of the Bainbridge Island Review, they were the only reporters on the West Coast to decry the relocation of Japanese-Americans and to oppose that federal order throughout the war. They did everything in their power to point out the terrible injustices being done at a time when we bragged about being a democracy opposed to dictatorships that trampled on human rights. They included news from Manzanar and other prison camps during the war. They treated all their readers alike. They were founding members of Saint Barnabas Episcopal Church. They lost subscribers, they lost advertising revenue, they were threatened; and yet, they held firm in their belief that all people are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. They used their bully pulpit of a local newspaper to strike repeated blows against fear, against prejudice, against craziness but they never rejoiced about their power but instead only worried about their neighbors. We could use some more people like Walt and Milly Woodward right now.

Few of us will ever be Tyndales or Woodwards in our lives. Our challenges will be smaller and quieter. But each of us has faced moments in our lives when we felt like a lamb among wolves. Each of us has felt like we have been sent out without a purse, a bag, or even a pair of sandals. We find ourselves a majority of one, speaking to an issue in one way when all others appear to be headed the other way. Holding to our Christian values – the Way of Jesus values – seems lonely, often seems unpopular, and sometimes seems very dangerous.

And when the seventy return exclaiming over their power and success, what does Jesus say to them? “Do not rejoice at this.” For this power is not their own – it is the power of God coming through them to help build up the kingdom of God. The seventy are channels of God’s grace and blessing, not the creators of that grace and blessing. The church has accepted this view and understands that even sinful clergy can still administer the sacraments, something that saves churches money and that I find very comforting. I am not the sacrament; I am not the blessing; I am merely one of the many ways that God, through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit brings the continual refreshment of God’s love for all creation to God’s beloved people.

In a while, someone else will have the profound joy and privilege of walking with you all and helping build up the kingdom of God. That person will be deeply blessed. But, that work is not

easily done some days. It requires discernment, sacrifice, even conflict to achieve a working understanding of what God is calling us all to do. If we engage in false pride, if we boast of ourselves, if we trample on others to achieve our personal desires, if we simply fall in with the crowds, if we silence ourselves in order to get along, we will reap what we sow. All power is always loaned, never owned.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.” Amen.