

Season after Pentecost - Proper 9C

July 7, 2013

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown, Maryland

Readings: Isaiah 66: 10-14; Psalm 66 1-9; Luke 10: 1-111, 16-20

The grace and peace of God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

Jesus had already commissioned “the twelve” and sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. But twelve weren’t going to be enough. Jesus commissioned 70 more. He sent them out in pairs. Yet even those 70 would not be enough. Jesus told them to pray to the “Lord of the harvest” for even more to be sent into the mission field. This mission, this Kingdom of God, was to be worldwide and it was going to take every follower of Jesus to make it happen. Some would be sent out and some would stay home but all were sent to proclaim the good news of Jesus. Not just twelve designated leaders but all who had come to believe that Jesus is Lord. It was the truth then and it is the truth now. When the Rev. Dr. William Willimon reflected on today’s gospel reading, it tugged from his memory this formative event.

I was ten years old and minding my business in Miss McDaniel’s sixth grade class, dutifully copying words off the black board, when I got the call: “Willimon, Mr. Harrelson says he wants to see you. Go to his office.” Mr. Harrelson was our intimidating, ancient Principal.

Shaking with trepidation, I trudged toward the Principal’s office. Passing an open door, a classmate would look out at me with pity, saying a prayer of thanksgiving that it was I summoned by the Principal, and not he. Ascending the gallows, I went over in my mind all of the possible misunderstandings that could have led to this portentous summons....

[Mr. Harrelson said} “Listen clearly, I do not intend to repeat myself: You, go down Tindal two blocks and turn left, go two more blocks, number fifteen. I need a message delivered. You tell Jimmy Spain’s mother if he’s not in school by this afternoon I’m reporting her to the police for truancy.”

Oh no. God help me. Jimmy Spain, [Jimmy the Hood], the toughest thug in the school, a sixth grader who should have been in the eighth. And what's "truancy"?

Pondering these somber thoughts in my heart, I journeyed down Tindal, bidding farewell to the safety of the schoolyard, turned left, and walked two more blocks, marveling that the world actually went on about its business while we were doing time in school. The last two blocks were the toughest, descending into a not at all nice part of town, unfamiliar territory to me, what was left of a sad neighborhood hidden behind the school. Number 15 was a small house with peeling paint and a disordered yard – just the sort of house you'd expect Jimmy Spain to dwell in – rough-looking, small but sinister. There was a big blue Buick parked in front of the house, and as I approached the walk, a man emerged, letting the front door slam, stepped off the porch, and began adjusting his tie, putting on his coat.

I approached him with, "Are you, Mr. . . . Spain, Sir?" Just then I remembered that everybody at school said Jimmy was so mean because he didn't have a dad. The man looked down at me, pulled his tie on tight, and guffawed. "Mr. Spain? Haw, haw, haw." Laughing, he left me standing there, got into his car, and sped off. (I had to wait until I was in the eighth grade before someone whispered to me the dirty word for what Jimmy's mother did for a living.)

I stepped up on the rotten porch and knocked on the soiled screen door. My heart sank when it was opened by none other than Jimmy Spain, whose eyes enlarged with surprise when he saw me. Before Jimmy could say anything, the door was pulled open more widely and a woman in a faded blue, terrycloth bathrobe looked down at me, over Jimmy's shoulder.

“What do you want?” she asked in a cold, threatening tone.

“Er, I’m from the school. The Principal sent me, to . . .”

“The Principal! What does that old man want?”

“Er, he sent me to say that we, uh, that is, that everybody at school misses Jimmy and wishes he were there today.”

“What?” she sneered, pulling Jimmy toward her just a bit.

“It’s like a special day today and everyone wants Jimmy there. I think that’s what he said.”

Jimmy, the feared thug who could beat up any kid at Donaldson Elementary anytime he wanted, indeed had on multiple occasions, peered out at me in wonderment. Suddenly this tough hood, feared by all, looked small, clutched by his mother’s protective arm. His eyes were pleading, embarrassed, hanging on my every stammering word.

“Well you tell that old man it’s none of his business what I do with James. James, do you want to go to that old school today or not?”

Jimmy looked at me and wordlessly nodded.

“Well, go get your stuff. And take that dollar off the dresser to buy lunch. I ain’t got nothing here.”

In a flash he was away and back. His mother stood at the door, and after making the unimaginable gesture of giving Jimmy a peck on the cheek, stood staring at us as we walked off the porch, down the walk, and back toward Tindal Avenue. As we walked back toward the school, we said not a word to one another. I had previously lacked the courage to speak to Jimmy the Hood, and Jimmy had never had any reason, thank the Lord, to speak to me. Walking back to school that morning was certainly not the time to begin.

We walked up the steps to the school, took a right and wordlessly turned toward the Principal's office. I led him in, handed him off to the Principal's secretary who received my ward. For the first time he seemed not mean and threatening but very small. As the secretary led him toward the Principal's office, Jimmy turned and looked at me with a look of, I don't know, maybe regret, maybe embarrassment, but it could have also been gratitude.

That evening, when I narrated my day to my mother at supper, she said, "That is the most outrageous thing I've ever heard! Sending a young child out in the middle of the day to fetch a truant student. Mr. Harrelson ought to have his head examined. Don't you ever allow anyone to put you in that position again. Sending a child!"

But I knew that my mother was wrong. That day was the best day of my whole time at Donaldson Elementary, and preparation for the rest of my life. It was my first experience of a God who thinks nothing of commandeering ordinary folk and giving them outrageous assignments. That day, walking down Tindal Avenue was dress rehearsal for many later days when in listening to a sermon, or minding my own business, it was as if God said to me, "You, go down Tindal two blocks and turn left, go two more blocks, number fifteen. I need a message delivered. . . ." ¹

"Sometimes the risen Christ shows up in people's lives by mysteriously appearing before them, or by whispering something through their hearts, or by just simply embracing them with the Holy Spirit. But more typically, Christ gets into our lives and into our world by sending people with his message. Paul could say to an early church that they were "ambassadors for Christ." We are the people Christ sends until he can get there. Or we are the people Christ sends after he has surprised someone. Or

sometimes he sends his ambassadors instead of going himself.”² Jesus chooses not to do his work alone. Jesus is a wild and wise delegator. Jesus enlists ordinary people and sends them forth into the world in his name. “You, go down two blocks on Tindal Avenue.....Haven Road.... Outer Drive....Irvin Avenue...Little Hayden Circle..... Pennsylvania Avenue... (You get my drift) and turn left, go two more blocks..... I need a message delivered. . . . “

To believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world is to be sent by Christ into the world. No exceptions. To believe in Jesus is to believe we are an extension of the work of Jesus. That means you and me, sent each day to proclaim in word and deed, “The Kingdom of God is near. God loves you.” And so we pray:

“Give us faith, Lord Jesus, to believe in ourselves half as much as you believe in us. [Commissioned at our baptism, you have called each and every one of us, each and everyday] to go forth in your name, to be your messengers and to enact your message in the world.³ “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.... Go on your way.” You says to us. And let our answer be, “We will! Thanks be to God” Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 7/6/13

ENDNOTE

1. William H. Willimon “Sent” July 7, [Pulpit Resources](#) July - September 2013

2. Willimon

3. Adapted prayer, Willimon