

Trinity 3 2019

Sometimes a message is so important that it must be told over and over again, repeated so that people will hear it, so that they will allow the message to take root inside them and bear fruit through what they do.

Do not be afraid! Jesus repeats this message time and again. It is a message those around him need to hear. It is a message all of us need to hear. Do not be afraid! This knocks the cobwebs from the dark corners of our lives.

Do not be afraid, Jesus tells the disciples late one night when he walks across the lake and climbs into their boat. Take heart! You don't have to struggle against this storm any more.

Do not be afraid, he tells the anxious, worried father whose child lies very sick. Only believe, and your daughter will get well, she'll be restored to you.

Do not be afraid, he tells disciples sitting in a circle round him. Not now, not ever! Your Father knows every last hair on your head, and he delights to give you the kingdom.

Jesus repeats this message—because it's important, and because we find it hard to accept. He's aware that fear comes easy to us.

Today Jesus repeats this message. Do not be afraid! He repeats it as he sends out seventy of his disciples to prepare the way in every place he will visit.

These seventy—we are not given their names. They are not prominent, like John or Peter or Andrew. They are quiet, unassertive, ordinary people. These seventy—we do know their number. To the Jews the number seventy stands for wholeness and completion. These seventy represent everybody.

What do you think they feel like, sent out in pairs to unfamiliar places, entering uninvited with a bold message to proclaim?

They must feel like we do, when we go forth from here to live the Christian life in all those places Jesus wants us to go. Like those seventy disciples, we too are sent forth, and we return again. We do this every week. On Sunday we gather to be sent forth once more.

The message we are to live out through our character and our actions may take us to unfamiliar places where we enter uninvited. And so we too need to hear what Jesus readily repeats: Do not be afraid!

Today he does not simply say this, but gives us a short course in how not to be afraid, a road map to the kingdom.

There are four fears from which Jesus wants us free. The first is the fear of people.

We are to heal the sick ones. We are to call down a blessing on all we meet. We are to increase wholeness and health throughout the world.

Some will like what we do and support us. Others will not. These others will reject gifts we offer. They may even scorn us.

But we're free from fear of people when we recognize how in everyone there appears deep brokenness. What others reveal to us may not be the glad truth of their existence, but the pain that boils and bubbles within them.

Whether these others know us for who we are is not the point. What's important is whether we do something to bring God's kingdom near.

There are four fears from which Jesus wants us free. The second is the fear of failure.

Jesus does not announce that success is all that matters. He does not tell us to counter resistance to our good efforts simply by pushes us in the same direction.

He says that when people in a town welcome us, we're to stay and do good among them, but when they do not welcome us, we're to get up and go elsewhere. In each case, we've brought God's kingdom near.

The public ministry of Jesus does not look like it comes to a successful end. What greater failure can there be than to be left alone on a cross to die?

Yet he rises from this disgrace, he rises from this disgrace, because there is nothing stronger than his faithfulness to his Father. Easter frees us from the fear of failure so our concern is no longer success, but faithfulness.

There are four fears from which Jesus wants to free us. The third is the fear of things.

Jesus tells the seventy not to take with them certain things they may think they need. The problem does not lie with the items themselves. The problem lies with what may be our attitude toward them. Lacking these things but wanting them may make us feel inadequate for what we're meant to do. Possessing such things may blunt our sense of urgency about service to the kingdom and may bring about separation between ourselves and others.

Such things may seem too important. In this consumer culture we are even taught that what we have determines who we are: I own, therefore I am. Insatiable desire becomes a virtue.

The way to the kingdom is different. We are released from the fear of things. What's important is not what we own, or even what we abstain from owning, but whether we travel light, whether we get where we need to go.

There are four fears from which Jesus wants us free. The last of them is the fear of needs.

Not once, but twice Jesus tells the seventy that in their travels they're to eat what's set before them.

This suggests they might do otherwise! They might become so zealous, so impressed with themselves, that they would forget their hunger, become afraid of their needs.

Not only are the seventy told to eat, but they're told to eat what's set before them.

We all have the same needs—among them food and shelter, affection and support, and a feeling of accomplishment. Do we conceal our needs? Are we afraid of them? It's part of what it means to be human to admit our needs. It's part of what it means to follow Jesus, who was not afraid to seek hospitality and support, who was not afraid to be dependent.

- The fear of needs.
- The fear of things.
- The fear of failure.
- The fear of people.

Jesus wants us free from all of these. He releases us from every form of fear through this sacramental sharing in his life, this freedom feast, which we recall in Holy Communion.

During the week to come, when we are dispersed in so many directions, each of us will, no doubt, feel rising in our hearts at least one of these forms of fear. This fear will try to disrupt our discipleship, interrupt our journey to the kingdom. But if we listen, we will also hear Jesus telling us once again: Do not be afraid!

Through faith we are transformed. Through the Church we are Transformed.

Amen.