

Did you ever go to summer camp? Do you remember the buddy system? At camp you wouldn't do *anything* without your buddy. Swimming, lining up to go into the dining hall, carrying water or firewood; it was always done two-by-two.

In our gospel today, that's what Jesus did with the disciples.

"..He sent them ahead in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go..."

It isn't done as a solo act. It's done in partnerships.

For a number of reasons that's a good idea. There is someone to share the work with, there is mutual encouragement, there is someone to keep one accountable, and humble.

And there is someone to watch your back.

Power to do these things that Jesus sends the disciples to do—Power to evangelize—well, it's *powerful!*

Whether or not a house receives a pair of disciples, they are to be told, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

Think about it. The mere fact of the disciples *attempting* to proclaim the good news means that the Kingdom of God has come near, Whether or not that good news is successfully received. And as our gospel tells us, it works! The disciples return rejoicing. Even demons submit to that power.

And those demons might be the kind we heard about a couple of weeks ago, who were possessing the man in the cemetery. Or they might be the demons of over-preparation, or too specific an idea of what success looks like. Or too much time and attention spent on exactly *how* to proclaim the good news, and what is the right way of proclaiming, rather than actually doing it.

You see, when there's so much time and attention spent on preparing and studying and so on—then we forget to keep an eye on how the Kingdom of God is *already* coming near the folks out there.

Evangelism is everyone's job. Every Christian's primary job. Even as we ourselves are being transformed, reformed, and remade into God's likeness according to the pattern of Jesus, we are to pass it on to others.

The Church's reason for being; the Church's very mission—is not its own.

As William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the early 1940's once said,
"The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."

Did you notice how Jesus tells the disciples *twice* to "Eat what is set before you" and to take no additional baggage? Each pair of disciples is to rely entirely on God and the people they are visiting to provide for them. They are to allow those they visit to extend hospitality. They are to work *with* others, and not always *for* or *to* others.

And sometimes that might mean not only working *with* them, but according to the *other* people's usual way of doing things, not our own. Letting them share the grace and wisdom and knowledge of God *already* at work in *their* lives--allowing them to act as host. And it might mean rearranging our own expectations about what we can *give* to them or *instruct* them about.

Our own favorite way of doing things, and our expectations might need to be left home with the extra sandals. We might need to leave behind those comfortable answers and experiences and formulations and vocabularies that serve us so well, and entering into someone else's reality. God is at work already and the job of the evangelist—that's us—may be to point to how the Kingdom of God is already in the midst of those we are sent to, in their own context.

We are to create a safe place and time amidst those to whom we are sent. A safe place and time to share hospitality, to share hopes and dreams. A safe place and time to recognize the grace in individual lives, to share doubts and fears, to listen deeply and hear beyond pain and resignation, and to speak of our own experience, not as "you must" or "it's the only way", but rather, to describe, however imperfectly or haltingly, how God's *Shalom*; *God's* peace has and continues to make a difference in our own lives.

Not that we have THE answer, but only, for ourselves, AN answer. We might, always tentatively, offer our own glimpses of God's reconciling work in the stories we hear from others, pointing to the Kingdom of God come near.

Together. In partnership with all others who are likewise called Christ's body.

AMEN

--- ----