

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	6 July 2025
Service:	Eucharist, Third Sunday after Trinity
Preacher:	The Revd Canon Vanessa Baron, Treasurer

The Feast of Pentecost seems rather a long time ago, not least because we've had so many anniversary events at the Cathedral, but these opening weeks of what are called 'ordinary time' can best be summarised under the heading, 'Life in the Spirit'. What does it mean to be, to live as a Christian who has been given the gift of God's Holy Spirit – the Comforter – the one who encourages us, cheers us on, energises us, rallies us, empowers us? The one who draws us together and builds us into living Temple or, if we prefer, the Body of Christ.

Last week, on the Feast of St Peter and St Paul the Dean preached about the way in which the leading figures of the Apostolic Church, St Peter and St Paul were very different from each other, disagreeing with each other on one occasion, but united in their allegiance to Christ and preaching the Gospel of God's love and reconciliation. He concluded that, 'But, as God did with these two very different figures right at the beginning of the Church's life, so he can and will use our various different aptitudes for his purposes and for the building up of his people.'

Today's Gospel continues these themes and invites us to reflect on the mission of the Church, through an episode that's only recorded in Luke's Gospel; namely Jesus sending out the 72 disciples.

We are used to the idea of the twelve apostles being commissioned by Jesus to 'preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth' but in Luke 10, Jesus sends out 72 ordinary disciples to go ahead of him with the message, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'.

There's some symbolism at play here. The 12 apostles were appointed to represent the 12 tribes of Israel, in other words, all God's people. But there's an episode in Numbers 11, where Moses is commanded by God to appoint 72 people to help Moses with his work. Jesus seems to be deliberately echoing this

passage and, interestingly, the 72 are given work identical to that of the Apostles. In other words, the mission of the Church is not limited to the few, but something that is shared by many more people.

So, what was the nature of their Mission? Jesus sent these disciples out to towns and cities ahead of him, **to tell people** that the 'Kingdom of God was close at hand' – not something far off, imaginary and distant – but near, in Jesus – that God was about to break in with his radical new way of doing things. **They were to heal the sick** – both as confirmation of the authenticity of their message – but also because caring for the sick says something about God's concern for the dignity and value of every human person. The Kingdom of God is a place where people are valued not because of their potential economic worth or success, but because they are brought into being by God. They were to go with a **message of peace** – in a time and place where, as Tom Wright points out, many people did not want peace – they wanted God's justice to fall on the Romans with a vengeance and for God to get rid of the Samaritans. Interestingly, **they were to do this together** - they were sent out in pairs – no flying solo.

The Difficulties of the Mission. Jesus does not pretend that this will be easy. He tells them that he is sending them out like 'lambs among wolves'. And Jesus seems to make it even more difficult – they are to take no provisions with them and they're not to greet people - to waste time chatting by the roadside. I think we can legitimately ask, why? Surely an emergency supply of money would be sensible. I think the way to understand this might be that this poverty forced total dependence on God. (And before we dismiss this as daft we need to remember that, down the centuries, some famous people have taken it seriously and literally - like Francis of Assisi.)

But if the Mission was demanding and difficult, the disciples seem to have returned with **excitement and joy**. They have found that their message has power over the forces of darkness and in that moment Jesus has a prophetic vision – it is as if earthly time collapses and, he sees the downfall of Satan, the enemy, that will happen at the end of time. A reminder that, as Christians, we live, not only in chronological earthly time but in the light of the eschaton/ the end of all things – a glory and a triumph awaits us.

So what does this mean for us? We are the body of Christ, called to walk with the Spirit and like the 72, to tell people and show them that 'the Kingdom of God is close at hand' – to make Christ known. It doesn't mean that we all have to be evangelists – that is obviously nonsense – but it does mean that each one

of us is called to do our part – bring our different experiences and characters to the task.

I know that many of you will be thinking, what can I do? I'm not very learned or I'm getting old – I don't have the energy I used to have.

I want to look at two applications that can apply to all of us. **First our everyday conversations** with family and friends – to take the natural opportunities to talk about our faith. By and large people are quite interested – there's an element of curiosity especially among younger people – who know nothing about the Christian faith – they have not been brought up in it and rarely encountered it even at school. For example, how many of us have had conversations about the recent Bill to permit assisted dying? We can explain how our Christian faith influences our values and decision making. We may reach different conclusions about the Bill in question, but what we can assert with confidence is, (to quote Rowan Williams) that 'a human person is worth extravagant and lasting commitment. A human being deserves complete attention and care, whether rich or poor, whether they will live for a day or for nine decades.' P 65 Being Disciples. We have a valuable contribution to make to this difficult debate.

Second – Christian hospitality and welcome in the Cathedral. At times we are good at this, but not always. If the Kingdom of God is a place where 'a human being deserves complete attention and care', we can show this in many different ways. It may be as simple as turning to your neighbour at the end of the service and talking to them – especially if you do not know their name. Our world is a rushed and lonely place – a kind word, a few moments of real attention demonstrate the compassion of God. Over coffee, instead of catching up with friends, introduce yourself and talk to someone you do not know well. Keep an eye out for the stranger; the person or couple standing alone.

God can only make his compassion, his mercy, his love known through us. 'The Kingdom of God is close at hand' – through the power of the Holy Spirit, may God make it known through us. Amen