

14 Ord 3 July 2016 St Peter's Upper Riccarton

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Watching Satan falling

I once met a woman who called herself a prophetess.

She had long straggling grey hair, wore a loose flowing dress, and carried all her possessions in a small shoulder bag.

She told me that, a few years before, she and her husband had given away all their possessions and taken to the road to preach and prophecy. She had a wild look in her eyes, and seemed to have lost touch with reality and become quite crazy.

I expect we've all had the experience of strangers knocking at our door, wanting to talk to us about God, and especially about the coming of Armageddon.

Usually I wait politely to get a word in edgeways and then say 'No thanks, I'm an Anglican!

Generally, we don't do that kind of ministry!

So what can we learn from this passage, apart from that times have changed?

Let's take a closer look at some of the details:

Firstly, the number of disciples -

In Genesis Chapter 10, there's a list of all the nations with a total of 70 (sometimes translated as 72), so Jesus' disciples would understand that he was sending them on a mission to the entire world. Then, when God's new kingdom begins there will be a gathering in of all God's people, Jews and gentiles - a great gathering of the harvest.

Jesus sometimes used an act of healing or the driving out of an evil spirit, to show that the Kingdom of God had come. Their task of healing the sick was another way of saying '*The kingdom of God has come near to you*'.

The same message is contained in the greeting with which they were to enter the houses: '*Peace be with this house!*'

Although it was a common greeting it wasn't just a formality.

Members of the household would expect to be blessed by this *peace*, which meant healing, wholeness and well-being if they accepted the messenger and his message.

But if not, then the blessing would remain on the messenger who brought the greeting.

When Jesus insisted on the disciples travelling lightly, taking no purse, or bag or shoes he was, of course, stressing the urgency of their task. When the crops are ready they must be harvested quickly, before the weather turns bad and the crop is ruined. The kingdom of God is nearly here, **now** is the time to respond!

They were to go out in faith as innocents abroad (*lamb among wolves*), vulnerable, and apparently ill prepared for a journey, to emphasise that they were dependent upon God.

In the end they would give thanks to God rather than take credit for anything that they accomplished themselves.

This mission strategy was appropriate to a culture based on hospitality.

Not everyone would be expected to welcome them as guests.

But they could expect some people to take them into their homes, in the same way that travellers, and especially teachers, were received in the places where they went.

The generosity of the people was reflected in Jesus' words about accepting whatever they were offered and not shopping around for a better deal.

To reject someone who's not an enemy, and refuse to offer hospitality, was considered shameful.

It brought disgrace and promised misfortune.

The same expectation is here, also. Reject these messengers and you reject Jesus;

reject Jesus and you reject God; reject God and you invite judgement.

When people joined together in mutual acceptance and fellowship at a meal they were responding in faith, just as we are this morning.

In his radical way Jesus and his disciples were offering a foretaste of the kingdom to come in their meals in the here and now. These meals were celebrations of hope, inclusion and healing.

The outcome for the disciples was that God blessed their work with obvious success. They returned joyfully from their mission.

It was an exciting experience and Jesus shared their joy, saying:

"I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.

See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. (Luke 10:18-19)

He's seen that the powers of evil have been overcome,

and the Kingdom has indeed arrived. That's cause for great rejoicing.

It's the joyfulness of sharing in far more than they could have asked or expected.

It may seem a long way from this strategy of mission to our modern day.

But I wonder if the invitation to join in God's kingdom still works like this.

It's about sharing a vision of change in such a way that we participate in making it real, here and now.

Not conversion but **conversation** around a table.

Radical changes in thinking may be necessary, and we will need to use every ounce of knowledge and strength that we have for our mission to be effective today;

but God blesses our work when it is done in love.

The harvest is plentiful says Jesus, but the labourers are few.

Sometimes this saying is used to justify a need for more ordained clergy, but this is based on a misconception about the nature of ministry.

We don't need any particular skill or training to be able to love people, and

show others the welcome, acceptance and compassion God has shown us.

We don't need a university degree to be able to talk about Jesus Christ means to us, and how our faith is bringing healing and hope into our lives.

And it doesn't take any great prophetic gift to recognise that people who are experiencing that something is wrong in their lives, need a loving

neighbour or friend.

We all know how easy it is to get discouraged. We're out there, doing our best, but it seems so insignificant. But what is Jesus response?

'I was watching Satan falling from heaven like a flash of lightning'.

We were only taking someone shopping, sharing a cuppa and a chat with a new neighbour,

or baking for someone who's sick but *Jesus saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven!*

We were only visiting a rest home, taking a child to sport, helping someone out when their garden's got too much for them, offering a holiday home to someone in need of a break,

but Jesus saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven!

The kingdom of God has come near, and although we might not recognise the significance of our little part in it, through us and many others,

God's tide of love and truth is pushing back the currents of corruption and brutality, violence and despair.

Our little drop in the ocean may not seem like much, but when the tide turns, every drop is in it together and nothing can stand in the way. **Amen**

Rev Marcia Hardy