

20101018 - Patronal Festival, St Luke's, Modbury  
The Right Reverend Denise Ferguson

Focus Reading: Luke. 10:1-9

***The Mission of the Seventy***

10 After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

Holy God open our ears to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may serve you today and always.  
Amen.

Good morning. I am so glad to be with you today. Covid restrictions these past months have certainly upset all our regular routines, and it is good to be able to reclaim at least a little of what is familiar.

Today in the church calendar we remember the life and ministry of St Luke, evangelist and martyr, the saint for whom this parish has been named. Before I explore St Luke's life and ministry more deeply, I am aware that this is my first official visit to the parish, I will briefly introduce myself.

I am Denise Ferguson, and in July last year God accompanied me on an incredible and unexpected journey when I was appointed as an Assistant Bishop here in Adelaide.

Mark, my husband, and I moved from New Zealand in 2014 when I was appointed to a parish in the Diocese of Brisbane. Mark and I had reached a point in our lives when it was time for a sea change – or in our case an island

change. We had both worked for the NZ Army earlier in life. Mark was a serviceman, whereas I was a Finance and Administration Manager. Mark completed 20 years' service in the New Zealand Army, and then I had responded to a call to ordained ministry. Life took us in a new direction.

Following three years of residential theological and ministry training I served in three parishes in New Zealand and was then appointed as a Diocesan Registrar and Manager, the equivalent of the Secretary of Synod in this Diocese.

In 2013 we started to sense God was calling us to something different again, and that journey has taken us to places we couldn't have imagined.

My ministry has been greatly blessed and hugely challenging. God has been a constant source of strength and guidance throughout that journey, and Mark has been a real blessing as he has followed and supported me on a journey we could never have imagined we when met 41 years ago.

This first year as bishop has certainly been challenging. I must admit, when I was consecrated none of us could have anticipated how 2020 would unfold.

Enough about me. I am looking forward to getting to know more about you in the years ahead.

I am sure you know far more about St Luke than I do, so I will keep the biographical details short.

It is recorded that St Luke was a Gentile, writer, preacher and teacher. He is understood to have been a friend and companion to Paul, who referred to him as a physician or healer.

Tradition recognises Luke is the author of the third Gospel that bears his name, and the Acts of the Apostles. These writings account for over 25% of the New Testament and make a significant contribution to our understanding of the life, mission and ministry of Christ, and the development of early Christian community.

Luke's Gospel emphasises the inclusivity of Jesus. For Luke, Jesus was a friend to Jews and Gentiles alike, and those considered outcasts at the time of writing, the least, the last and the lost. As Luke's Gospel progresses, we hear

not only of Jesus' growing ministry, but also of his empowerment of others to 'go ahead of him', preparing the Way for what was to come.

Today's Gospel passage recounts the sending out of the seventy 'ahead of him', however this was not the first contingent Jesus had commissioned. Earlier in Luke's Gospel we have heard of the gathering and commissioning of the twelve apostles. For each group of followers, the mission was essentially the same; they were to do what Jesus had been doing; heal the sick and proclaim that the Kingdom of God had come near.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. In itself, a profound journey with a significant outcome. That journey to Jerusalem would quite possibly take Jesus through towns and communities he hadn't encountered before, although the Gospel records that he certainly intended to visit them. His reputation was spreading fast, and the time taken to journey to Jerusalem was restricted by events still to come. Sending emissaries ahead of him gave the people a preview, a foretaste of what to expect when Jesus himself arrived. But it did more than this, it gave a plan and a pattern for ministry and mission to continue when Jesus would no longer be with them.

What can we learn from this plan and pattern?

Jesus told the seventy

*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;*

For those who have chosen to follow the Way of Christ, God's story of Salvation History, and especially God's actions in and through Jesus, has touched our lives in a deep and transformative way. We want to share that with others but often struggle to do so.

Have you noticed that we find it easy to share celebrations and milestones? Last Friday, as I sat in my office, I watched the crowds start to gather at the oval. It seemed like half of South Australia was preparing to support a sports team in a semi-final. (I won't mention the outcome of the game!) The energy and passion were palpable.

When it comes to sharing the Good News of God in Christ, where is that same energy and passion? *The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.*

Jesus called the seventy to prayer.

*'therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'*

Teresa of Avila, a woman who contributed significantly to the development of Christian Thought and History wrote *'For prayer is nothing more than being on terms of friendship with God.'* How do we develop and sustain this strong friendship?

Jesus told them

*3 Go on your way.*

Jesus sent the seventy out in pairs. This could have been purely as a practical safety measure; however, it is also a reminder that collectively we do the work of God in Christ. We are sent to be active in reaching out into our families, communities, and God's world.

Jesus cautioned them.

*See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.*

Jesus knows that there will be challenge and opposition for those who share the Good News.

He said

*4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.*

The seventy are to travel light. They are not to be distracted by the trappings of life.

The seventy were called to bring blessing to the homes they visited.

*5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.*

They are to extend God's grace and generosity, regardless of the response, and so are we.

Jesus charged them

*7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.*

The seventy are to be grateful for the hospitality extended to you and don't 'play favourites' seeking out alternative arrangements.

They are to be grateful

*8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you;*

The seventy are to be blessed by the grace and hospitality offered, regardless of abundance or scarcity.

And finally, in this passage Jesus instructs them  
*9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*

Ultimately, the seventy are to do as Jesus did.

We too are called to continue the ministry and mission begun by Jesus. We too can find wisdom, strength and empowerment in this same plan and pattern.

I mentioned a quote from Teresa of Avila earlier in this reflection. She was remembered in the church calendar earlier this week. St Teresa of Avila was a mystic, writer, spiritual director, teacher of the faith and the first woman to be made a doctor of the church in the Roman Catholic tradition.

One of her most famous quotes embodies the principles of Jesus sending out the seventy and is powerful reminder for each of us, as we too go ahead to prepare the way for Jesus return.

*Christ has no body on earth but yours;  
no hands but yours;  
no feet but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ looks out to the world.  
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.  
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.*

Yours is the life, lived in Christ, that will prepare the Way for his return.

The journey of these past months has certainly been challenging, and I suspect there are more trials ahead of us. However, we also have much to be thankful for.

I do want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of you for the many ways in which you have cared for one another and stayed connected during these past months.

Thank you in particular to the leadership team – lay and clergy. When all that is familiar literally disappears overnight and the goal posts keep changing it is a very difficult place to try and lead from. You have all done an amazing job.

We pray for an end to the pandemic, for families to be reunited, jobs to be restored. We pray for healing for the many ways in which lives and communities have been impacted these past months, and for direction as a new way of being unfolds.

But in the meantime, we give thanks for God's faithfulness, the example of St Luke, and the reminder of St Teresa that we are Christ's body here on earth. And we pray for courage and patience for the journey ahead. Amen.