

Homily for Sunday, July 4, 2010

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost (Proper 9)

By JoAnn Taylor

First Lesson	Isaiah 66:10-14
Psalm	66:1-8
Second Lesson	Galatians 6:(1-6)7-16
Gospel	Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

...in the name of God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - our guide and vision. Amen.

With God, all things are possible. This is a complete statement of faith - a reminder of God's promise that if we lay aside all our burdens, cares and wants at his feet, he will provide all that we need.

President Abraham Lincoln used a similar statement - "Nothing in this world is impossible to a willing heart." How many times each day do we tell ourselves that something is impossible? There isn't enough time to get it done? We don't have the right equipment or tools? It costs too much to maintain? Why is it so hard to believe God's promise - to provide all that we need for our lives? [pause] Maybe, because we are never satisfied with what God provides. Maybe because we are always looking for more - more to eat, more to drink, more money, more games, bigger houses, nicer cars, - more.....more.....more. WELL..... let me tell you a secret.....God wants more, too. God wants more workers for his kingdom.....God wants more prayers, more faith, more love, more mercy, more peace.....in fact, God has quite a list of things that he would like more of. But, how much are we willing to give to God? Why are we so selfish with our time, our talent and our treasure? All that we have comes from God - so why don't we willingly give back to God what we owe?

[pause]

In our gospel today, Jesus tells his disciples that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. The harvest was indeed plentiful - and is even more plentiful today in our modern society. Every day more and more people are in need of help - in need of hope - in need of the peace that can only be found through Jesus. How many families are in need of a safe place to live? How often do we see children in need of warm clothes, shoes, coats and mittens in the winter? What about the victims of drugs, alcohol, physical or spiritual abuse; the poor, the disenfranchised, the lost, runaways, the homeless, and those who are without jobs - who takes care of them? Society? Sure, society steps up and provides a few

homeless shelters, a rescue mission or two, a clothing closet, a soup kitchen here and there - but these are only seeing a few of the many who are in need - a veritable drop in the bucket compared to the reality. The harvest that Jesus is talking about exists in all facets of our society - hospitals, schools, prisons, among all races, religions, cultures, among the sick, the elderly, the handicapped, addicts, the young - many are without hope, without faith, and without love. Mother Teresa said, 'Many today are starving for ordinary bread, but that is not the only kind of hunger there is. There is another hunger - the hunger to be wanted, to be loved, to be recognized. Nakedness too is not just the want of clothes. It is also the loss of dignity, loss of purity, loss of respect. And there is homelessness, which is not just want for a house made of bricks, but the homelessness of being rejected, of being unwanted, of being unloved in a throwaway society.' Every day is a harvest day - but the laborers are few, tired, worn out by the constant demands - we need more laborers.

[pause]

In Luke 9:1-6, we hear the commissioning of the Twelve - the core group of followers - the disciples. Just as in today's gospel, they were given authority over all demons and the cure of all disease; they were told to travel light, and to stay in whatever house they entered first - not to move around. The number 12 is significant - it represents the number of Israel - the 12 tribes - and indicates that the disciples' first mission was among their own people. Today, Jesus is sending 72 of his followers out into the world to preach the good news of God - but not to the Jews this time. Seventy-two was believed to be the number of Gentile nations on the Earth. This is a much wider mission than the first and more dangerous. The number 72 was symbolic to the Jews - it represented the number of the elders picked to help Moses; it also represented the number of the Sanhedrin - the supreme council.

[pause]

Luke also includes Jesus' message for both the preachers of God's word and the hearers. He makes 5 points:

1. The preacher is not to become cluttered with material things; he is to travel light. It is easy to get entangled in the earthly things of this life - earth must never be allowed to block our path to heaven.
2. The preacher is to concentrate on his task; he is not to be distracted by lesser duties or personal pleasure when the business of God is at hand.

3. The preacher must not be in the vocation for what he can get out of it. In Jesus' day, there were prophets who wandered from town to town. The law said that any prophet wishing to stay in one place for more than 3 days without working was considered a false prophet. Likewise, any prophet who asked for money or a meal was also considered a false prophet. Jesus makes it clear that no servant of a crucified Master can be a seeker of luxury.

4. Hearing the word of God is a great responsibility. We judge according to what we know - according to what we have experienced. We tolerate actions in a child that we will not tolerate in an adult. Jesus teaches us that age brings greater understanding; with greater understanding comes greater responsibility.

5. When we hear God's invitation - his call - we have a responsibility - a duty to respond - to answer that call. Each time God calls and we refuse to answer - every time we hang up the phone when he calls us - well - one day those refusals will be witnesses against us. We will be condemned by our inaction.

When the 72 return they are full of themselves - boasting of the victories they have won in Jesus' name. Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven."Wow! That wasn't exactly what his followers wanted to hear. It is a difficult phrase to understand - for them and for us. There are two possible explanations for this statement. One is that Jesus was aware of their victories over evil and the forces of darkness; the fortress of Satan had been stormed and the kingdom of God was underway. In this context, Jesus' statement would be like saying 'Great Job!' His followers were getting a crash course in some serious on-the-job training and had done well. Jesus was happy with the result. The second explanation makes this sound like a rebuke - like Jesus was scolding them for taking pride in their accomplishments. He was reminding them that even the greatest of all the angels fell victim to the sin of pride and was cast down from Heaven because of it. - Just a side note here - does anyone remember what Lucifer's sin was? We know that his pride became his downfall but how did his pride get in the way? Lucifer's great sin was that he placed himself on an equal footing with God.

[pause]

A man went to the farmer's market - he had no particular reason for being there - he was new to the city and needed some food and other items for his new home. While shopping, he walked past a jeweler and there in the center of his display was a huge pearl, a shimmering hint of blue, perfect in its shape - totally without blemish. Such a pearl was a rare find and worth a great deal of money. The man forgot

all else - he had to have that pearl. He sold everything he had until he owned only the clothes on his back - and used the money to buy the pearl. {pause} The story of the pearl is the story of the gospel and our parish. In the *Messenger*, I spoke of a visioning process that the Vestry has started; we need to find a direction for this parish to carry it into the future. Our survival depends on it. We need to find one great idea -something that only we can do - one path that all of us can get excited about. We need to find our 'pearl of great price'. Once we find that pearl though, we will need to care for it, tend it, work hard to make it a reality and join together to share our new direction with our neighbors, and the wider community. Ideas seem to be plentiful - like the harvest in our gospel - but the laborers willing to put these ideas to work for our parish are scarce. Throughout the recent past, our mantra has been that we want growth, youth, and ministry for Incarnation. Have you been thinking about the article I wrote for this month's *Messenger*? Are you asking yourself these questions?

What is church growth?

What skills do you bring to the parish?

How can you use your skills to benefit the parish?

What are your dreams for Incarnation?

If Incarnation closed its doors, would we be missed? How or why would we be missed?

What can Incarnation offer to the community, the diocese or our neighborhood?

What are you willing to do? How are you able to help?

I mentioned last week in the bulletin a wish list of things that we would like to see but haven't had the money for? Number one on the list is a guaranteed salary for a full-time, experienced, secretary for not less than 3 years - including benefits. Number two is stripping and waxing the floors in the parish hall - not including the marble in the breezeway and stairways - the donation of either (a) the funds to have it professionally done or (b) the manpower and equipment to do the job right. Number three might be some 6 or 8 foot folding tables like those advertised in the Shopko ads for \$40 each. They have plastic tops and could be folded and stored in the shed for outdoor picnics and events. Then we wouldn't have to carry heavy tables up and down the stairs. Other things will come up as people start to brainstorm ideas of their own. Everything we do now can be seen as preparation for our future. It all takes time, commitment and money. Remember those two 3-legged stools that I talked about in that article - the foundation of any church is tradition, scripture, mission, people, spirituality and money. Incarnation has tradition - lots of tradition and history - and we do alright with scripture - worship, bible studies, etc.,

we're a bit short on people and money, our spirituality could use a bit of work, too - but what we are truly missing is mission. We need to find our reason for existing. What is God calling us to do? Not as individuals - but as a church with all of us collectively working together to achieve our goal - God's goal. Where there is no vision, the people perish. I offer this thought - where there is no vision, the people become indifferent, comfortable, and rooted to one place. God doesn't want us to become rooted to one place or too comfortable or indifferent. God wants us to be proactive, strong, energetic, prayerful, workers for his kingdom - and that kingdom is right here where we're sitting today - our church, our neighborhood, our community. We don't have to start with big things - little things add up and actually make more of an impression than the infrequent large things that we do. As we think about our future let us pray the motto for the Order of the Daughters of the King:

For His sake....I am but one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. What I can do, I ought to do. What I ought to do, by the grace of God I will do. Lord, what will you have me do?

Amen.