

C Proper 9 – Holy Trinity 2010

“Whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me”. These are ominous words I think, and match the words in John, **“Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in the one who sent me.”** Jesus once again proclaims to those who will listen, that to have seen him is to have seen the Father, remember the words to Philip? **“Have you been with me all this time Philip, and you still do not know me? To have seen me is to have seen the Father.”** To have heard him, is to have heard the Father, **“I speak just what the Father has given me.”** To follow him is to follow the Father. **“Whoever serves me must follow me....Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.”**

And the threat behind these words is made very explicit in the passage that leads up to them. This passage, like the one last week where the little Samaritan towns wouldn't welcome him, comes during Jesus' final, fateful, journey to Jerusalem, the final evangelistic push before the Passion. This would be the time when people would have the stark choice put before them; do they accept Jesus, listen to him, follow him, or do they crucify him. We know now what choice the people made.

Jesus is very clear about the implications of this. It will be worse for towns, and the people who live in them, who reject Jesus than it was for Sodom. He said if the things done in the Jewish towns of Bethsaida and Chorazim had been done in the Gentile town of Tyre, the people there would have repented and followed him. It's strange isn't it, his reference to Chorazim suggests that he was well known there, that he had done mighty works there; and yet we know nothing about it. It's a reminder that we really know so very little about all the things that Jesus did.

Now, I want to say a little about this reference to Sodom, because there has been a lot of confusion over it. You remember the story, Abraham's nephew Lot had chosen to live in Sodom, one of the cities of the plain. I suspect there was as much wariness between nomads and city dwellers then, as there is now; what do you think for instance of gypsies? And for the nomads too, they thought of towns as soft and corrupt. It seems that these towns were particularly notorious, but what for is never made clear. That's the background. The final straw as it were, that sealed Sodom's fate, was to try to rape God's messengers who were staying with Lot. There is another story very similar to this in Judges, where the people of Gibeah demand that a Levite and his concubine, staying in the town be given to them. In that case the poor girl was raped and murdered. In both these stories it is not just the nature of the sex, so much as the fact that the sacred duty of hospitality has been violated in the most degrading way possible. (Rape of men and women was then, as now, used as a military strategy to humiliate a foe). This is the way that Jesus uses the story here. He has come to them from God, offering life and hope, and wholeness; and they reject him. More than that, they take him and beat him and murder him. Sodom and its people were destroyed in a violent earthquake, Gibeah by their outraged neighbours. Well might Paul say, **“Be not neglectful of hospitality, for thereby people have entertained angels unaware.”** *But it will be worse now*, because Jesus is not simply a prophet or even an angelic messenger, he is the Son of God. Several of Jesus parables take the same line. For instance the one about invitations given to the wedding banquet, or the one about the wicked tenants of the vineyard, who beat the servants sent to collect the rent, and then when the master sends his

Son, they murder him. Everybody who heard that story would know that Israel was God's own vineyard, that the farmer in the story was God himself, that the servants who were sent were the prophets, that by implication Jesus was the Son, and the tenants who were destroyed for their wickedness, were they themselves who were listening. Be under no illusions Jesus is saying, how you welcome and accept me is vital. To hear God's word is a great responsibility and they will be judged on what they know and how they respond.

And the number of people involved in this mission to challenge the towns and villages, is significant too. Luke was probably the most worldly and most outward looking of the four evangelists. Seventy was an important number for the Jews, because they believed it was the number of nations in the world. I think Luke saw this number as symbolizing and foreshadowing the time when the good news of Jesus would be taken to the whole world. This, on a small scale was what was beginning to happen on the world stage even in Luke's own time.

There are so many parts to this story, and things in it that we could talk about, but I am concentrating on the challenge that was being offered to the people of the towns Jesus and his seventy Disciples were visiting. Jesus sent these disciples out, in his name, to heal the sick of mind and body, to preach the good news, to wish the peace of the Lord to those who welcomed them, and to say "the kingdom of God is open to *you and you and you*, if only you will accept the invitation."

I wonder if you have ever seen the picture by Holman Hunt, "The Light of the World". It is based on the text from Revelations, "**Behold I stand at the door and knock.**" It is a slightly gloomy picture, if the door in question is the door of our hearts, it looks as if the door has been closed for rather a long time. The hinges are rusty, the door is unpainted, the garden around is wild, the sky dark and threatening; and there is a depressing tangle of weeds in front! It is a most unlikely place to expect an answer! Perhaps it is always like that, perhaps we should never expect a huge response. Jesus said the way was steep and narrow to eternal life, and few find it. The narrow and steep way is no easier to find now, when many people believe that modern understanding and knowledge makes belief in God redundant.

And yet here we are today. We are here because we believe these things are true. We believe that God called creation into being. We believe that this God is not some remote unknowable force, on the contrary we believe that he always wanted to reveal himself to his world. We believe that in Jesus he shared our life and shared his thinking with us. We believe that by faith in Jesus we can find the narrow climbing path into his Kingdom. We believe that Jesus stands knocking on door into our lives and hearts, waiting, longing for us to greet him and welcome him in. "**Behold I stand at the door and knock, if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you and you with me.**"