

Pentecost 4 / July 3, 2022

Luke 10:20

“Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

When was the last time you felt joy in your heart? Happiness is one thing; joy is something completely different. Joy is happiness in the extreme. Happiness can be a state of being. We can be in a happy place or a happy state of mind. Joy is a spontaneous feeling of happiness, often born of an unexpected reversal of fortune or the sudden realization of something of great value. If someone gave us a device that commanded great power, we might believe it on an intellectual level. But we would only truly appreciate its power when we saw it working. When it worked, we would be filled with amazement and joy! The faithful in Israel believed God’s promise to restore the tribe of Judah to the promised land at the end of the Babylonian captivity. They believed, but when it happened, they were filled with joy. They exclaimed “Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy.”

The seventy-two disciples were probably happy when Jesus chose them to proclaim the kingdom of God. It was an honour to be singled out for such service. Nevertheless, they may have felt some trepidation when Jesus told them not to take any provisions, but to rely on the good will of the people they would meet. They may have felt a little uneasy when He warned them of opposition, saying, “I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.” They were probably happy when He gave them power, so that demons were subject to them in His name. When they realized that the power really worked, they were filled with joy. When they returned, they shouted excitedly, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name.” They were filled with joy. But the most important thing was not power over demons. What is most important is the power of God’s salvation in Christ Jesus and knowing that for His sake our names are written in heaven. In this we rejoice!

We all like power. We’re lost when the power goes off. When the power goes off, we can’t watch television or surf the internet. Power makes us feel bigger. Power makes us feel bolder. The seventy-two disciples rejoiced when they realized they had power. They were bigger people. But power can also cause us to miss the bigger picture of Jesus; the reason He came, the means by which He accomplishes His purposes and the way He works in the world and in our lives. His power was made perfect in the weakness of the cross, by which He atoned for our sin and secured our salvation. Jesus sent the seventy-two to proclaim the kingdom of God. The most important thing is God’s kingdom. The kingdom is His righteousness reign, which begins in the human heart through repentance and faith in Jesus. All the power in the world is nothing in comparison with God’s righteous reign in our hearts through faith in Jesus’s name. We rejoice that in the humility of repentance and through faith in Jesus’ name, our names are written in heaven.

Jesus sent the seventy-two to proclaim the kingdom of God and to prepare people for His coming. They went with a sense of urgency. The harvest was plentiful, but the labourers were few. If they were received favourably, they were to remain in that place teaching the kingdom of God. If any village refused them entry, they were to shake the dust from their feet as a warning against impenitence and move on to the next village. He gave them a share of His power to heal the sick and cast out evil spirits, as signs that God’s righteousness reign was drawing near in Him. The signs were not meant to impress people with the disciples’ power. They were intended to lead people to trust the promise of God and the power of His love, which is expressed most fully in Christ Jesus. The seventy-two disciples would proclaim the coming of Jesus and call people to enter the kingdom of God through faith in Him.

Jesus calls us to faith through the voice of the church and the witness of believers. In our gospel, Jesus selected seventy-two for this service. Nevertheless, the proclamation of the kingdom is the privilege and responsibility of all believers. In the letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul speaks of the ministry of the church saying, “He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Christ established the office of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the sake of the ministry of the word. But He didn’t give the ministry of the word exclusively to any of those offices. In fact, those offices are given to support the ministry of all believers in proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. The kingdom is the grace of God in Christ Jesus and the blessing of forgiveness to all who call on His name. We all share in the ministry of the word, by which Jesus is proclaimed as Saviour and through which, people are called into God’s kingdom through faith in Him.

It's important that we pray for people to fill those offices in the church. We need leaders to fill the positions of apostle, evangelist, pastor and teacher. Whether we use those exact terms or not, the point is that Jesus established the public ministry of the gospel. But the purpose of that ministry is both to preach the gospel and to help the whole church share the gospel. Jesus as a human being couldn't do it all by Himself. He sent twelve and then seventy to go in His name. The ministers of the church can't do it all by themselves either. The harvest is plentiful, too plentiful for any person or small group of people to gather. We all have a share in the kingdom through faith in Jesus. We all have a share in the proclamation of the kingdom. We all have the privilege and responsibility to tell people about Jesus and call them to faith in His name.

That may seem intimidating. If you feel intimidated, you are not alone. In fact, you are in good company. When God called Moses to proclaim His kingdom to the kingdom of Pharaoh, Moses gave every reason he could think of to be excused. Finally, he just said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." God would send others. He sent Aaron to help him. Later, He appointed seventy elders to assist him. After Moses was gone, He sent many prophets to continue the work. In the fullness of time, He sent His Son. But God called him. God promised to put words in his mouth. Jesus also calls us to proclaim the kingdom. He promises to bless us with His Spirit. He promises to empower us with His gifts that we may be able to proclaim the good news of the kingdom through faith in Him. Even as He will provide opportunities for us to witness in His name, He will give us the words to speak of His saving love and the promise that everyone who calls on His name will be saved. He who calls us is faithful and He will do it. In this we also rejoice!

We rejoice that for the sake of Jesus our names are written in heaven. We rejoice that we are given the privilege and responsibility to go in Jesus' name and tell others the good news of the kingdom of God. There is no greater message than the word of the cross, the good news that Jesus has paid the debt of the sin of the world. There is nothing more powerful than the gospel of Jesus. Through the gospel, the Spirit calls us from the domain of the devil and brings us into the kingdom of God. There is no blessing greater than faith in Jesus as Saviour. There is no privilege greater than sharing Jesus with others and calling them to faith in Him as Saviour and Lord. In this we rejoice!

God who has given us faith to believe and written our names in heaven for the sake of Jesus, also empower us to share the name of Jesus with others; the good news of the kingdom of God that everyone who calls on His name will also have their names written in heaven. In Jesus' Name. Amen!