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THE LINE

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OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS

Analysis of the Seven Churches in Revelation: Philadelphia

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

This is our sixth article discussing the Seven Churches in the Book of Revelation. We embarked on this daunting task many months ago based on our call to use this past Lent as a period of discernment, not just for our individual churches, but also for our Convocations and for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints.

As we may all know, it is our goal to examine each of these seven churches to see what we can do in order to be a church and a Diocese that is a beacon of faith and hope and a light to the world. We now continue our analysis with the sixth of the Seven Churches – Philadelphia:

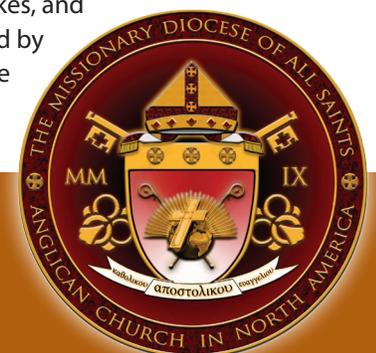
And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth: "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie: behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from

the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly, hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.'" [Revelation 3:7-13]

Philadelphia, like Thyatira and Sardis, is one of the inland cities referenced in Revelation and, like Smyrna, is one that still exists today. It is now the Turkish town of Alaşehir. It is located in a very beautiful valley, about twenty-eight miles southeast of Sardis. The city itself was built on four or five hills and was a fortified city. The one bad feature of this area is that it is very prone to earthquakes, and in 17 A.D., this city was destroyed by one. This is the same earthquake that destroyed Sardis and other Lydian cities, but the Emperor

The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.



Tiberius allocated vast sums of money to rebuild them, and Philadelphia was rebuilt.

Many of us may know that “philadelphia” is Greek for “brotherly love;” but we may not recall how it got this name. Eumenes II, who was king of Pergamum, named the city for his great brotherly love for his own brother, Attalus II, who succeeded Eumenes to be king of Pergamum. Additionally, Philadelphia was used as a “missionary” city for the Greeks. It was used by the Greeks to spread the Hellenistic culture throughout Asia Minor and the Anatolian country-side, which the Greeks considered barbaric and in need of “conversion” to the Greek ways and culture. Philadelphia, therefore, became like a Greek island in Lydia.

As for its Christian roots, there is still a Byzantine church in this town, and some remaining Christians left in the city, but they are well hidden for fear of persecution. And this fear is well-founded. The Seljuk Turks, who took the city in 1074 and then again from 1093-94, brutally killed the Christians in this city. Philadelphia is also where the Christians and Saracen fought during the First Crusades, and was recaptured by the Byzantine Empire in 1098. It remained one of the few Byzantine provinces in this area, and was completely surrounded by the Ottoman Turks. It eventually became an independent, neutral city under the influence of the Latin Knights of Rhodes. Then something quite sad happened. In 1390, the Sultan Bayezid I and Byzantine Emperor Manuel II joined forces to retake the city. Bayezid had forced Manuel to participate in this subjugation to Turkish rule. Finally, Philadelphia was the scene of Greek and Turkish fighting in 1922.

With this in mind, let us now turn to our passage:

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth.

In each of the passages we have already examined, Christ uses something that authenticates the passage as being spoken by Him. This section is no exception. In this passage there are several very interesting references, which are synonymous with Christ and reveals that it is He who is addressing the Church in Philadelphia.

The first reference is to Jesus as the “Holy” One. We know that He was Holy at His birth. In the Annunciation, the Angel of the Lord pronounces that Jesus is the Holy One:

And the angel answered and said unto her, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.’ [Luke 1:35]

And Christ is still the Holy One now that He sits at the right hand of God:

For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. [Hebrews 7:26]

Jesus is also the True One. In the Gospel of Saint John, Chapter 14, Verse 6, where Christ announced to the world, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by*

me.” Now, “true” here means “genuine” with the added note of perfection and completeness. Jesus is the perfect, genuine One; no other can make this claim.

Then there is a very important and unique reference to Christ as *he that hath the key of David*. Jesus holds the key of David because He is the descendant of this king (see Romans 1:3) and the heir to his throne as Messiah (see Luke 1:32). And, because He has these keys, Jesus is the One *that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth*. This is a direct reference to the prophet Isaiah’s statement:

And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. [Isaiah 22:22]

So, in short, we know that the Church in Philadelphia is being addressed by Christ, Himself.

“I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”

This church is unique in that Jesus has no words of condemnation. They are all words of commendation. Jesus knows their works and they are good! This is truly a joyous thing. Yet, in these words of commendation, there is still a very powerful lesson both for our church and for each of us individually.

First, Christ as keeper of the Keys of David has opened the door for the church in Philadelphia. Therefore, no man has the power to shut it. But, what door has Christ opened? For Roman Catholic scholars, this door has a double meaning. It could be a door for missionary opportunities, for which the Roman Catholics point to 1 Corinthians 16:9 and Colossians 4:3. They also believe that it may mean that Christ has opened the door to heaven, that through this access, the church in Philadelphia will be able to engage in a heavenly liturgy where God is perpetually worshipped as indicated in Revelation 3:20 and 4:1. Eastern Orthodox scholars see it as an open door to His Kingdom. They refer to St. Ignatius who calls Christ the Door to the Father. As for Protestant scholars, some see it as a door to the joy of the Lord, while others see it as a door to knowledge of the Scriptures. We may never fully comprehend what this open door means, but I believe the church in Philadelphia fully understood this reference.

Then, Christ says that they have little “strength.” The Greek word used for “strength” is “dunamin” from which we get the word “dynamite.” “Dunamin” here probably means “power.” In other words, this church has very little temporal power. They were probably a small and poor church, but powerful in their sincerity of worship and belief.

I imagine this church being very similar to the church I started attending immediately after I came back to the Lord. It was a Roman Catholic Church that was in a working class neighborhood. The building looked like it was built from plywood, and none of the stained glass was great art. Yet, in this humble building built by humble people was a deep love of God, and a sincere worship that made it possible for anyone visiting

to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in their worship. This was probably also true of Philadelphian church.

What is made clear by this passage is that these people in Philadelphia loved the Lord. They kept His word, and they did not deny His Name. In a persecuted church, this is saying a lot. Not denying His Name may result in a loss of income, and, during Domitian's persecution, may mean death. And, to keep Christ's word means loving God with all your heart, soul, body and mind, and loving your neighbor as yourself. This is truly a great commendation to give to any church.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie: behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

This reference to the "synagogue of Satan" was also made to the church in Smyrna. In that passage, Christ says, *'...and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.'* In both these cases, Christ is saying about the same thing.

As you may recall, when I wrote about Smyrna, I pointed out that Saint Paul, in his letter to the Romans, speaks of Jewish people who are not true Jews. He wrote that not all Israel is OF Israel (Romans 9:6). He also condemned those who taught the law, but did not live it. (Romans 2:17-29). In this passage from Romans, Saint Paul explained the difference between a true Jew and one that was not: *For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.* (Romans 2:28-29)

A true Jew is therefore one who lives, not by the letter of the Law, but by its spirit. He is one who does not live for the praise of men, whether it be the local rabbi or his friends and neighbors, but rather lives to praise God. From these two passages, it is clear that the Jews in both Philadelphia and Smyrna who persecuted the Christians were not "true" Jews. They may have lived by the letter of the Law and therefore thought themselves justified in persecuting the Christians, but they did not live by its Spirit. And that is why Christ called them the synagogues "of Satan."

Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

A better translation of "worship" is "bow down." No one is to be worshipped except God, and Jesus is not saying these people will be worshipped by the Jews in Philadelphia. No, rather he is saying that they will be forced to acknowledge that this church is the beloved people of the New Covenant as indicated in Isaiah Chapter 60, verse 14: *The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, "The city of the LORD," "The Zion of the Holy One of Israel."*

Now we come to a part where theologians split in their interpretation, and they split along denominational lines:

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the

world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Whereas Evangelical Scholars see this as a veiled reference to the rapture and the Eastern Orthodox see the possibility, the Roman Catholic Scholars I have read do not see it at all.

In the mid-nineteenth century, an independent evangelical minister came up with the theory of the Rapture. This minister looked at 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God:

*and the dead in Christ shall rise first: **then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.** Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

[Emphasis added].

What his theory entailed was the belief that, just before the Great Tribulation (which will also include the rule of the Anti-Christ), the true Church of Christ will be "raptured" into heaven. In other words, Jesus would make sure His Church would escape the Tribulation by physically removing the people prior to its start. And the removal would be similar to Elijah's or Enoch's or Christ's own ascension. This theory is also the basis for the popular "Left Behind" series of books.

Since the mid-nineteenth century when this theory was first articulated, the Roman Catholic Church has never, to my knowledge, officially adopted this belief – though there are certainly some Roman Catholics that believe in this scenario. For this reason, I believe we have a separation of interpretation.



The Evangelists I have read believe Christ's promise to keep the church in Philadelphia from "the hour of temptation" is telling the faithful that they will be raptured. The fact that this passage also says that the whole world would be "tried," they would point out, confirms their interpretation.

The Eastern Orthodox, like I said, take a very neutral position on the Rapture. They do not deny this possibility, but they do not support it, either. They do see this reference to the "hour of temptation" as an apocalyptic image referring to the testing and tribulation preceding the manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. But they do not believe this passage is referring to the Rapture. They have their own interpretation.

The Eastern orthodox point to John 17:15 where Christ says: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil," and they would say that Jesus is promising the faithful that they will be preserved during their time of trial and protected from demonic assaults. However, they do not believe this passage is promising that the church in Philadelphia will be removed.

The Church won't be rescued from suffering, persecution, or martyrdom. In other words, they believe that Christ is promising that they will be sustained and supported so that they may persevere in their faithfulness.

Unlike the Eastern Orthodox who do not deny or support the possibility of the Rapture, the Roman Catholics Scholars that I read actually go out of their way to deny that this passage has anything to do with the Rapture. They quote the Greek word for "all the world," *oikoumenē* or *oikoumene*, and state that it really means the Mediterranean world ruled by Rome. They then say that, if Revelation was written in the 90s A.D., then this section most likely references the persecution of Domitian (A.D. 81 to 96). They believe Christ is promising protection from widespread suffering. However, they maintain that there is no "hint" that this passage is referencing the Rapture of the Church into heaven prior to the period of the Great Tribulation.

Behold, I come quickly, hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

The word "quickly" does not mean that Christ is coming soon; rather, it means "suddenly." This dovetails well with Christ's

parables of the thief in the night, and the ten wise and ten foolish virgins.

The reference to the crown is clearly the "crowns of glory that fadeth not away." (1 Peter 5:4 "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.") In other words, Christ is telling the Philadelphia church, like He did with Smyrna, to hold on to their faith. If they do so, then they will join the Saints in Light and will be given the crowns of glory.

The "pillar" is a reference that has come up in Scriptures. It is an illusion to the fact that we are living temples indwelt with the Spirit and the glory of God:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. [Ephesians 2:19-22]

The "pillar" is also a referenced to being in an honored position:

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. [Galatians 2:9]

But then Christ talks about "my God" which some may find confusing. Jesus is not denying His own divinity in this passage. Rather, He is speaking from His humanity, having both natures. Finally, the name that will be given will be as part of our citizenship in the divine Jerusalem, as is alluded to in Ephesians 2:19-22.

I think every church would like to identify with Philadelphia. They

seem to be doing everything right. They may not be powerful or rich or huge in numbers, but they are doing God's will, and that makes them a "mega" church in God's view of the world.

Are we Philadelphia? Many of our churches in the Convocation of the West share many of the same qualities and attributes. Many are not large; many are not powerful; and most are not rich. But do we have the spiritual power, the richness of faith, and a love of God that is all-encompassing? Only prayer and meditation can tell whether this message to Philadelphia really applies to us. I am hopeful that we have the "ear" to hear what the Spirit is telling us.

Amen.



THE LEFT HAND OF GOD



By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott

The polite term for it is “civil unrest,” a time of protests and demonstrations, uncertainties, fears and great anger tearing society into polarized pieces, culminating for one segment in a spasm of violence, arrests and a frustrating failure, after coming close to success at the capitol. Or, at least, that is what many of the militant core thought in the demoralizing aftermath, and it was certainly the opinion of the general public. But it isn't the end of the story.

This describes the events leading to January 6th in Washington. It also describes what happened in Jerusalem, the capitol of Palestine, at Passover in the year 33. In the latter case, the small but energized group eventually called “Christians” had hungered for the day when they could throw out the designated authorities and restore the rule of the old kingdom as they perceived it.

The moment of decision arrived. As the armed authorities came at them in the night, they must stand and fight, or flee to rise another time. Their weapons ready, they awaited the leader's command.

But the leader neither resisted nor fled, giving the command instead to lay down their swords. The leader was arrested and taken away. Amazed, scared and confused, the band scattered to avoid apprehension themselves. It was not until Jesus was able to debrief them over the next few weeks that they finally got it. Their Kingdom was not an earthly one. To be sure, Jesus had told them before, but they were so immersed in the propaganda of the time that they failed to grasp the radical difference between the Kingdom of Jesus and an earthly political kingdom. And it is not the end of the story.

To their credit, once it was finally knocked into their heads, they never wavered from the true Kingdom again. As the movement grew, reoriented to its real purpose, the apostles made it clear. “Every person is to be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and

those which exist are established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God” (Romans 13:1-2). Even when those authorities persecuted the Christian community, the message was the same: the authorities have a role assigned by God, even if the authorities themselves don't realize it and abuse their power. God has made an orderly creation out of chaos. His children need that order to thrive. Nor do we know the mind of God, and how he uses the bad political apples to achieve his purposes.

By the Fourth Century, the Byzantine emperors had become Christians. The persecutions stopped, but it was not always helpful for the Church. As one example, Christians in places like Armenia found themselves caught up in imperial disputes, persecuted by the Persians for being too cozy with the Byzantines and by the Byzantines for staying out of the conflict, seen as a lack of loyalty to the “Christian” emperor, a situation not dissimilar to the current plight of Christians in Russia and Ukraine.

And so it has gone ever since. The determination of the early Church to avoid politics has been replaced by a chaos of activities. In the Middle Ages, the Pope called on Christians to take up arms and conquer the Middle East, resulting in violent conquest of large portions of what is now Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Turkey in the name of the Kingdom of God. The oppressed were both Moslems and Eastern (i.e. non -papal) Christians. The hatreds and bad memories which invariably follow forced and violent suppression continue to have negative consequences to this day.

Today, the U.S. is again in the throes of “civil unrest.” As someone who has friends across the political spectrum, apparently a rare phenomenon, I witness the uncertainties, fears and great anger. Those emotions are the only common bond. When the fears and anger are directly at our fellow Americans, the common emotion isn't much use as a bridge. Nor do I sense any great desire for a bridge among most. It isn't going well, and hardly needs to be stated that it doesn't look like it will end well.

Out of Christian history, including the New Testament, what wisdom can we apply to this? Are American Christians going to be part of the problem or of the solution?

So far, Christians appear to be in the problem category. “Christian” has become a synonym for a brand of politics. The other half of Americans perceive Christians as bigoted, racist, misogynist, against democracy and voter’s rights, contemptuous of government, rabid in support of all manner of guns easily available to all manner of people. Clearly, there are elements of caricature in this perception. Yet whenever someone appears in the media identified as “Christian,” they seem to resemble the description. There have always been preachers who made Christianity sound like the Old Testament national religion of a warrior tribe. But the identification of Christianity in total with one side of the American civil struggle is a great escalation.

What can those of us do, who see following Jesus as being quite a different road? When I now hear the word “Christian” in public, I cringe, in anticipation of the distortions of Faith about to be expressed, by both those who identify as Christian and those who oppose what they suppose Christianity to be. Evangelism becomes an exercise in trying to explain why we Christians, followers of Jesus, the New Testament and the Tradition handed down, are not at all who people think we are. Since unlearning something is harder than learning it, we have a big job. Nevertheless, our mandate is to do what we can, in whatever context God has placed us.

As usual with such polarities as we face, it is necessary to go back to basics. It doesn’t matter whether we are talking to those who have rejected what they imagine Christianity to be or those who see themselves as Christians, but define it without reference to Biblical truth.

The most basic truth to start with is that God is love and,

consequently, God loves you, no matter your politics, lifestyle, violent tendencies, idol worship or whatever. If you and I can make no further progress than to incessantly repeat the love of God, in word and deed, applied to all, we have achieved the most important thing we can do. You will need the Scriptural references to verify your statement of love, so you had better learn them. People tend not to believe it can be true, sometimes do not want it to be true (“how can God love those [fill in the blank] people, who do not deserve it?”) Sometimes people believe it, but have a hard time seeing it as consistent with the message of the Church. Who can blame them? But all we can do is explain that Church as we practice it is entirely about this message of love. We cannot help what others proclaim, but we can show the Scripture and tell the story of the Cross and Resurrection, and the many parables and stories of Jesus illustrating the love (the woman at the well, the Good Samaritan, the Pharisee and Publican, the Sermon on the Mount, etc).

In the polarized, adversarial era we are presently experiencing, Jesus calls us, as always, to be the voice of peace, love, reconciliation and service to others. When “Christian” means instead a party spirit, contention, condemnation, one “side” in the fight, the message from Jesus has been lost. Evangelism in this context means to reflect the true spirit of Christ to all.

We Christians do not use government as a weapon to inflict our views on a resisting society. We Christians accept government as the left hand of God, to achieve a peaceful order among us, so that we may express the love of God to all parties.

“Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance; that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness” (Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity).

Request for a Bishop Coadjutor

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Bishop Lipka has informally notified the ACNA that we will be requesting a Bishop Coadjutor for our Diocese. He will make the formal request when the College of Bishops meets in September. For this reason, I am asking all of you for prayers that the Holy Spirit will guide the College of Bishops to allow this selection and will guide our Diocese to select the right man for this position.

To that end, the Standing Committee will be looking for individuals to be on the Search Committee. Please also pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the Standing Committee in this matter. We need qualified individuals from all three Convocations.

God bless,
Fr. Michael Penfield
Your Vicar General

Plentiful Harvest, Few Laborers

(Mission of the Seventy(two))

A Sermon by Fr. Jim Short, Proper 9 2022

Isaiah 66.10-16. • Ps 66 • Gal 6.1-18. • Lk 10.1-20

He said to them, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

We saw last week that there is a cost to following our Lord Jesus. Once you have decided to follow Jesus, there is "no turning back." If you put your hand to the plow and look back, you are not fit for the kingdom of God (9.62). I can speak to this! When I am plowing for neighbors in Uganda, it is absolutely necessary to make the first line through the field as straight as possible.... "Keep your eyes on the prize", as Paul would say. Don't look to left or right, but only at the point you have chosen in the distance. If you take your eyes off this point, and start to look behind at the plow to see how you are doing, then you will have a nice curve in the field - and every line after that will be messed up. Your plowing will be fit for nothing, not "fit for the kingdom of God", as our Lord would say.

Follow me, says Jesus. And don't be distracted - easy for me to say, and so very hard to do in 'real life'.

It is in this context that today's gospel begins. The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him, "two by two" (duo duo in Greek), into every town and place where he himself was about to come. He is testing them. 'Can you follow instructions? Can you not get distracted?'

Let's find out.'

Seventy "others", said Luke. These folks were not the Twelve. They were another group. Thank God that Luke told us about them, for otherwise we would be forever thinking that it was only the Twelve that had "the magic", that were given "the gifts". Who were these folks? We are not told, but I have an idea: they were not what today we would call "the clergy", i.e., they were not part of the 'hierarchy, 'the apostolate'. They were following Jesus around in his travels and ministry "into every town and place he himself was about to come". Perhaps we could call them 'camp followers'? Or maybe we could use the musicians' term and call them 'groupies'? These are the quiet, unsung folks who go on tour with the music stars, make traveling arrangements, set up and tear down all the equipment and staging, and assist with whatever they are asked to do.

Everybody focuses on "the stars". But without the groupies, without camp followers, nothing would get done. They make 'the stars' look good - even if they are lousy.

My mandolin teacher, Dave Holodiloff, once told me of a famous mandolin player who couldn't tune his mandolin, or play in different keys! Instead, he had his groupie assistant set up several mandolins on stage, each tuned to the required key. Professional musicians have a standing joke: jazz musicians play

three thousand chords for an audience of three, while rock players play three chords for an audience of three thousand!

And yet, the seventy, the 'groupies', were quite successful with their mission. "(They) returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" (10.17). Nobody thought that they could 'play three thousand chords', except the Lord who sent them out. But somehow they did.

So why were they successful? They were not "the messengers" that Jesus sent out in 9.52, who went into the next village "to make ready for him." The messengers would go and make plans, just like the groupies, except that they would then go back to the Master and say, "Ok, Lord, all is ready for you to come and minister (preach, teach, heal, other messianic signs)". But in the case of the seventy, they were sent out on their own, in pairs. "You go, and do this....". Then come back and report when you are done. The assignments were completely different.

Jesus says "Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road." (10.3)

The missionaries are bidden to fulfil their task with the utmost haste: they are to carry not even the simplest impediments, to avoid the time-consuming futilities of oriental wayside etiquette, to waste no time on the heedless, and to leave behind them any scruples they may have about the ritual cleanness of food, which would certainly hamper their effective progress. Their mission is an urgent one because they are harvesters: Israel is ripe for the sickle and must be gathered into the garner of the kingdom while the brief season lasts... the kingdom is present and men must be summoned to enter it before the opportunity goes by for ever. (Caird, St. Luke, p.142)

The missionaries are to look to God for their sustenance, not their wallets. This is what our Lord says in the Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. (Mt 6.31)

"The purse" was a money bag. "The bag" was a traveler's bag, like a knapsack, for one's belongings for a trip. "Sandals" probably means not to carry a spare pair, especially since there was no bag to carry them in. For the ancient Jews, standard footwear was a pair of simple leather sandals or shoes. To go barefoot was a sign of either extreme poverty or humiliation, as in the case of war prisoners. That is not what our Lord meant here when he told the seventy to go without sandals. He was concerned with the

seventy doing their mission with “the utmost haste”, and not getting distracted.

“Greet no one on the road.” In many parts of the world, greetings can be quite formal and drawn out. This is certainly true with many of the tribes of Uganda. One must stop for those passing by on the other side and greet them all. Meetings can be seriously delayed as everyone greets everyone else with handshakes and small talk. Some churches that exchange the peace turn into a similar situation. Some people love this, while others despise it. My father, the very social one, would take endless time to greet people and make them feel important. Mom would tell him to hurry up and dispense with all the small talk.

The urgency of Jesus’ instructions recalls those given to Gehazi by Elisha the prophet: ‘gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet any one, do not salute him; and if any one salutes you, do not reply; and lay my staff upon the face of the child’. (2 Kings 4.29). In commenting on this passage, Dr. Manson says....

In this case the matter is one of life and death: no greetings are to be exchanged on the way because the business is urgent. So in the charge to the disciples their mission is a sacred one, and it is very urgent. There is no time to waste in wayside pleasantries. The greetings withheld on the journey are to be offered on reaching the destination. (Sayings of Jesus, p.257)

I learned this lesson (as I learn the vast majority of life’s lessons) the hard way, when I was a student at Oxford. At the end of each term, we were sent on a short term mission (two weeks usually) to some part of England. My first ‘mission’ was to Liverpool, in fact, the parish where the Beatles had first started out in the early sixties. It was still pretty run down in 1974, when I got there. Every morning, our mission team would meet for prayers in the local parish church, and then we were given our assignments for the day. Mine was usually to go knock on doors and share ‘good news’ with the locals - all of them living in red brick row houses typical of the northern industrial cities. Then in the evening, it was to go to a home meeting somewhere and visit with whoever showed up to listen. Maybe this is when I first learned how ‘sales’ worked? I had the door slammed in my face more frequently than not. This was Everton parish, which later became home to the famous soccer team. Liverpoolians don’t mind a good fight.

But one evening, I attended a home meeting, which was being led by an older Indian student, Cherian, who was my prayer partner at Wycliffe and took me under his wing. Cherian was a true man of God: I believe his father was a bishop in India, no mean feat! So we started sharing with the folks there, and I said something about how much God loves us. And you know what? Those folks said ‘thank you, we never heard this before. This is truly good news to us. What do we need to do now?’ I was dumbfounded - something I had said actually made a difference? But Cherian, God bless him, stepped in and said “here’s what you should do”, and then guided those new

believers into the Kingdom.

I will never forget that day. That’s when I learned the gospel words have the power of eternal life. You don’t have to be a ‘professional’ preacher to share good news. You can be one of the unidentified seventy that the Lord sent out - and watch miracles happen. All we need to do is find one person, and share with them “the Kingdom of God has come near you.” That’s all it takes. If their mind is open, and their heart is ready, they will receive the good news of Jesus Christ with thanksgiving and come to belief. They will say, as Lydia said, “if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” (Acts 16.15). A whole wonderful hymn was built upon this verse: O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee.

Come to my house and stay.

We ‘modern’ Christians don’t believe in our own powers of persuasion for His kingdom. Perhaps we have forgotten that it is not us: it is Him, working through us. Look at what happened to the seventy: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”

The power to overcome the demons is a cause for rejoicing because it is a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God. The same divine power which is manifested in the Master is now manifested in the disciples. ...The overcoming of the demons is the overthrow of their chief. (Manson, Sayings, p.258)

Do we have any demons to contend with? Do we know anyone who is struggling with ‘demons’? Look around, and you will see that “the fields are ripe for harvest”, but there are few laborers in God’s enterprise of ‘saving souls’. Don’t you just feel sometimes as if you are the only voice “crying in the wilderness”? Well, take heart, you are not alone.

The situation is urgent. The need for our Lord’s good news has never been greater. Jesus was a man on fire with the Good News that his Father’s kingdom was imminent. Dr. Manson has observed...

it is greatly to be feared that with the abandonment of the belief in the imminent end of the world, the sense of the urgency of the preaching of the Kingdom has been lost; that, hypnotized by the idea of progress, we forget that there is such a thing as repentance. (Sayings, p.76)

When we missionaries accept that “all our endeavors are to be understood as ways in which the Risen Lord continues his work in the world”, then we are not far from the kingdom of God.

*...the best propaganda for genuine Christianity is **genuine Christians**; and the New Testament is full of declarations of the convincing power, not of the spoken word, but of the lived life. The lesson is not about Christ: it is not Christian doctrine, or Christian ethics, or Christian principles: it is Christ himself. (Manson, Ministry & Priesthood, 19)*

When we preach that the kingdom of God has come near, we are proclaiming, as Origen said, that **our Lord Jesus is in our midst**. And when He is ‘in’ our lives, then we have found “the peace which passes all understanding.”

Amen