

Canon Jonnie Parkin.

Baggage and Peace.

Matthew 10.1-22

Evensong 6th October 2024.

The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Baggage and Peace.

It sounds like a really niche Netflix detective series, set in the 1950s, but it's actually the theme of this sermon. This evening's reading from Matthew is close to my heart. One might expect that a Canon Missioner should like a reading about disciples being sent out, given that mission means sent out. Jesus gave his disciples very clear instructions as he sent them on their way, including instructions about Baggage and about Peace.

Concerning baggage: Jesus travelled light, and in this reading he encourages his disciples to do the same.

“Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff”

In this instance, Jesus wasn't just anti baggage, he was anti bag! He probably laughed at the amount of stuff we crammed into the coach for choir tour this summer, and don't get me started on how much stuff we loaded into that poor minibus for Taizé. We heard about some of it on Backpack Sunday.

The key to mission is to travel lightly, but the church seems obsessed with carrying huge amounts of baggage around with it, which is probably why we wait around in church and expect people to come to us. By baggage I don't just mean physical stuff, I mean expectations, theological, cultural, ecclesial expectations. We are, I think, weighed down with expectations of what church should and shouldn't look like, what worship should and shouldn't look like, what discipleship should and shouldn't look like. And those heavy expectations suggest to me a lack of trust, a lack of faith that the Holy Spirit goes out before us and equips us, a lack of trust that Jesus is already there waiting for us to arrive as we go out in mission. The technical term for God going ahead of us and equipping us is *prevenient* grace, *prevenient* meaning going before and *grace* meaning God's unconditional gifts to us.

I must confess, there are times when I prefer convenient grace to the prevenient variety. But to put our trust in prevenient grace as we go out in mission means trusting that God will provide for us, and that God is working in the contexts we are sent into a long time before we show up. We don't take God on mission, we discover God in mission. So leave some of the baggage behind. Trust that God will give you what you need, and that God is already present and active. Trust that the Holy Spirit is ready and waiting to guide you.

This Brings us onto peace.

“As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.”

Luke phrases Jesus' words slightly differently, though admittedly in the context of the sending out of the seventy two rather than the 12.

“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you.

Both have roughly the same meaning, though I do bristle a bit with Matthew's use of the word *axia*, which we tend to translate as worthy, though I will follow my own advice and put that bit of baggage down, for now. What Jesus is saying is do not be afraid of losing the peace within you. If you offer peace and it is not reciprocated, do not be alarmed, your peace returns to you. Just because another person refuses to accept a gift of peace, it does not mean that you are diminished or that your peace is wasted. Peace, real peace, deep shalom, is a gift of God, and we don't lose it when we share it, and we don't lose it when other people refuse to accept it.

I think in mission we can be hugely anxious about whether people will receive the gifts we offer. But part of travelling lightly, of letting go of the expectations and burdens, means not being dependent on the acceptance of others for our own inner peace. We are not sharing God's love because we are trying to feel good about ourselves or want to deserve to be loved, we are sharing God's love because it is lavish, generous, exuberant, wasteful, prodigious and overflowing. We share God's love because it propels outwards and draws us in. We don't lose love by sharing it, and we don't lose peace by sharing it. So travel light in mission and share God's love and peace. There is an infinite supply.

Prayers

Let us pray.

God of our pilgrimage

Help us to walk lightly on the earth

Deliver us from false expectations

The expectations we have of our planet home to provide unlimited resources,

The expectations we have of others to conform to our desires and plans,

The expectations we have of ourselves to be the solution to every challenge

we encounter.

Give us instead a spirit of expectancy,

A vigilant openness and curiosity to what you are doing in the world.

God of peace

Give us your deep peace, not the false peace that numbs us to the pain of the world, but the peace that comes with righteousness and justice, healing and wholeness.

Help us to be leavens of peace

To be people who live out your reconciling love in a broken hurting world.

God of mission, go before us, behind us, beneath us and over us, around us and inside us, not as our personal protective bubble, but as the one who is in and above and through all things. Propel us out into your world, that we may join your creative, healing, redeeming work of building your kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.