

Messengers of the Churches

12th Weekend of Kingdomtide – August 26/27, 2006

Sermon Background Study

Romans 10:14-15 (NRSV)

¹⁴But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

2 Corinthians 8:16-23 (NRSV)

¹⁶But thanks be to God who put in the heart of Titus the same eagerness for you that I myself have. ¹⁷For he not only accepted our appeal, but since he is more eager than ever, he is going to you of his own accord. ¹⁸With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his proclaiming the good news; ¹⁹and not only that, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us while we are administering this generous undertaking for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our goodwill. ²⁰We intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we are administering, ²¹for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of others. ²²And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found eager in many matters, but who is now more eager than ever because of his great confidence in you. ²³As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

Today’s Scripture passages do not seem deeply theological, but instead reflect the practical realities of living out the vocation given us by God. This a practical theology of the Good News.

I’ve mentioned before in these studies that I’m drawn to Paul’s letters. I think, in large part, this is because Paul is doing the hard work of building up Christian communities. He is encouraging, instructing, and even rebuking these young communities as he goes about the work of the kingdom – inviting people in, welcoming them, challenging them to be true disciples of Christ and summoning them to their own work for the kingdom. Today’s passages give us a peek inside Paul’s exhortations to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and to be eager messengers of the church in all that they do.

The Good News

It is worth reviewing what we mean by the Good News, or more precisely, what Paul means. The Good News (*evangelion* in the Greek, also translated “gospel”) is not a summary of Jesus’ teachings nor a synopsis of his life and not even the comfort of knowing that Jesus loves us. Granted, all of that is good and much of it is news to many of us, but it is not what Paul nor the other NT writers mean by “Good News.” The Good News is a proclamation to the entire world that Jesus is Lord. It is no more complicated than that and no less profound. It is a public proclamation of something we claim is true. This world, indeed all of creation, has one Master and that person is Jesus. It is to him and him alone that every knee should bow (see Philippians 2:6-11). This is the Good News that transcends all other news because unless it is so, the world and all its inhabitants are adrift in a cosmos that is still lost. Richard Burrigge writes, “Paul says remarkably

2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians has been of enormous importance to the church. For example, chapter 3 gives us the fullest presentation of the Christian categories of old and new covenants (a.k.a. “testaments”). Yet, in some ways the letter seems a bit of a hodge-podge, ranging across diverse topics and styles. Many scholars believe that 2 Corinthians is actually portions of several letters to the church in Corinth that were merged into a single document.

Despite questions about its unity, Edith Humphrey writes that the theological drive in the letter is integration. “Above all others, this letter reminds us that pastoral, academic, and theological roles are best held together. Paul addresses the particular questions of his beloved church without losing sight of the larger picture.”

Paul seeks to resolve problems with church authority and structure. He calls the people to holy lives in which even the mundane is God’s. He urges them toward generosity as he reminds them of Jesus own “generous act” (8:9). Paul defends his own ministry against those he believes are trying to pull the people away from the one true God. Through it all, Paul seeks to build up this still-fragile community of believers.

little about Jesus' ministry, and rarely quotes his teaching. Instead, he sees the whole nexus of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as a totality. In the 'Christ Event' God has acted to save men and women – and the whole cosmos. It is the central pivot of the ages."¹

But how is this Good News to be believed, to be trusted? In a series of four rhetorical questions, the ever-practical Paul urges the Christians in Rome to understand that for the Good News to be trusted and embraced by people, it must first be proclaimed to them, and it can only be proclaimed if there are those willing to go out and do the proclaiming. But who is to do this proclaiming?

The messengers

The words can get a bit tricky here. In 2 Corinthians 8:23, Paul describes Titus and the unnamed "famous" brother as *apostolos*, which the NRSV kindly translates here as "messengers." We often

mistakenly assume that when the New Testament writers refer to apostles they mean only the twelve² plus Paul. But, in truth, the NT uses a wide range of meaning for "apostle," which is simply the Greek word for "messenger," or more fully, "one who is sent with full authority." For example, Paul refers to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, specially commissioned by the risen Lord just as were the original twelve. And he clearly sees this as differentiating himself from other Christians. But he also lists Junia, almost certainly a woman, as "prominent among the apostles" (Romans 16:7) and lists "apostles" as among the gifts given to the church (Ephesians 4:11).

Christians have disagreed about exactly what to make of the varying distinctions among *apostolos* in the NT. Roman Catholics and Pentecostals have arrived at very different conclusions and, as you might guess, we Methodists are somewhere in the middle. Yet, all Christians find unity in Christ's call for us to be the light to the world, to go and make disciples, to be messengers of the Good News. We may be given different gifts of proclamation, some of us may be better at deeds than at words, but we are all sent.

The glory of Christ

Paul writes that these messengers of the churches are the "glory of Christ." Glory is the image of God, the divine transcendence, made visible to others, to the world. It is a social term. It is about seeing God. Thus, Jesus is the glory of God, for he makes God visible – see Jesus, see God. The cross is the glory of God, for it makes God's redeeming love visible. Titus and the unnamed brothers are Christ's glory because others can see God at work in them and through them. Their dedication and devotion to their God-given vocation glorifies Jesus Christ because it helps the world to see that Jesus is who they claim he is, namely, Lord and Savior of all.

We too are messengers of the church, called to invite others to the Lord's table here at St. Andrew. We too are the glory of Christ, for our friends and neighbors can see God at work in us as we lovingly and enthusiastically invite them to join us at St. Andrew!

The Balanced Life

Is your faith balanced? Your marriage? Your parenting? Your finances? Your inner self? Your understanding of God? Your interaction with the world around you? Are you confused by so many different denominations using different sections of the Bible to teach apparently opposite ideas?

This lecture course will examine 8 major aspects of life to develop a truly Biblical balanced lifestyle. Jesus told us the road is "narrow." The Bible consistently gives us boundaries on both sides of the narrow road, allowing us to walk down the middle of the road and avoid the ditches on both sides. Unfortunately, many churches like to focus only on one side of the issues – leading to an unbalanced faith and life. The course is designed to allow us to lead a balanced life the way God intends.

This class will meet on Sunday evenings starting September 17.

Serving with Eyes Wide Open

Why are we called to serve? How do we best serve? Is the purpose to benefit those we serve or is there a greater purpose for us as servers? What's the relevant message for us today? Join us as we explore the practical, theological and spiritual aspects of Christian service and the field of mission. This class will be an informative and enriching look into the recognition and response to the Christian call to mission, for the very core of being human is the task of mission. This class is designed to help us make the most of our internal nudge to connect and help people in need. Mission, be it short-term, long-term, overseas or next-door is about sharing a living image of God.

This class will meet on Tuesday evenings starting September 12.

To register on-line for these or other St. Andrew Academy fall classes, please go to www.standrewacademy.org

¹from "And in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord," in *Exploring and Proclaiming the Apostles' Creed*, Ed. Roger Van Harn, Eerdmans Publishing, 2004. I am teaching an Academy class this fall on the Apostles' Creed: *What Christians Believe and Why it Matters*. There are two sessions for this class, Monday morning and Tuesday evening. Go to www.standrewacademy.org for more information.

²You'll recall that Matthias was chosen to replace Judas (Acts 1).

Thru the Bible Daily Bible Readings

August 27 - September 2

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help.

Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Sunday Nehemiah 8-10; Psalm 119:17-32 At a pivotal moment, Ezra calls all the people to a public reading of the Covenant. There is even a public signing!</p>	<p>Monday Nehemiah 11-13; Psalm 119:33-48 Jerusalem grows, the city walls are dedicated, and the reformation of the people moves forward.</p>
<p>Tuesday A day for reflection and catching up</p>	<p>Wednesday A day for reflection and catching up</p>
<p>Thursday A day for reflection and catching up</p>	<p>Friday 1 Timothy 1-3; Psalm 119:49-64 This letter is all business, as Paul instructs Timothy and the church on a variety of topics.</p>
<p>Saturday 1 Timothy 4-6; Psalm 119:65-80 Pay close attention to Paul's warnings about false teachers. This a dominant theme in the later NT writings. Read closely Paul's warnings about the love of money.</p>	

Sermon Notes

Announcing the new St. Andrew Academy!!
Registration is now on-line at www.standrewacademy.org
Please register early. This will really help us.

We've completely revamped the Bible Academy. It is now the St. Andrew Academy. We've added lots of new classes and teachers: marriage, parenting, spiritual gifts, missions, and more have been added to our classes on the Bible and spiritual formation. An all-new brochure has been designed and has been mailed to thousands of homes in our area. This is outreach! You can see the class schedule and register on-line at our new website: www.standrewacademy.org.

Scott's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. We have more than ten small groups meeting now and a growing number of opportunities to meet other members of the St. Andrew community. If you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott Engle at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at sengle@standrewcccl.org.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Several years ago, my family and I were able to see a revival of *The Music Man* on Broadway. You may know this story of a redeemed con man. At one point in the story, the townspeople excitedly gather in the main square to await the arrival of the Wells Fargo wagon. What will the wagon bring this time? A gray mackinaw, a bathtub, or a cross-cut saw? Everyone is so excited that the mere sight of the truck is cause for celebration.

Paul uses a metaphor from Isaiah 52 to capture that same excitement over the arrival of the messenger bearing God's Good News. The feet of the messenger are beautiful! What the messenger brings is so wonderful that even her feet are lovely to the eye - like the wheels on that Wells Fargo truck.

Try to imagine the very best news that you could take to your friends and neighbors. Maybe it is a cure for cancer. Or the end of hatred. Maybe money pouring out of the sky . . . or the promise of eternal life. Would you hesitate to invite them to join in this exciting news? Wouldn't you pound on their front door until they answer?

Why do you think that so many of us hesitate? What makes us hesitant believers? Is it our own lack of excitement? Is it a public world that increasingly insists the messenger keep the news to himself? How could we begin to overcome our hesitancy? How could we help each other in this?