

St Botolph's Church Worthing
3 July 2016
Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20
Galatians 6: 7-16
Father Roger Walker

Our Gospel Reading containing Jesus' instructions to his disciples – as he sends them out on a mission to the local towns and villages – does not seem particularly relevant to us. For, realistically, we are not going out as travelling missionaries. It's hard enough to bear witness to our own faith to those among whom we live. They certainly would not respond to us if we were to present the faith as 'the Kingdom of God is near'.

The only positive encouragement we can find from this reading is contained in the very last words: 'Rejoice that your names are written in heaven' – this rejoicing, however, in Jesus' message that the Kingdom of God is near are both reflected in our Reading from Galatians. We can probably find a lot more to speak to us there, and the words that bring us up short are 'a man reaps what he sows'. St Paul was having trouble with the Galatians – as he was with most of his churches – for they found it difficult to trust in salvation through Jesus Christ and to love their neighbours as themselves.

There is also a long list of 'acts of the sinful nature' that St Paul had obviously found among them, and he reminded them forcefully that 'those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God'. We tend always to equate the Kingdom of God with Heaven but the word that St Paul – and Jesus – used for Kingdom is probably better translated as Kingship or rule. So in our Gospel Reading it makes more sense for the disciples to be saying 'the rule of God is near', meaning a call to change the way we live our lives. But St Paul is definitely looking to eternity and God ruling over us in heaven. However that is not going to happen if we indulge our sinful nature, which will result in us 'reaping destruction' whereas, if we 'sow to please the spirit' we will reap eternal life.

We know that this is the way we should live a Christian life, and we try hard to do so, but St Paul is a realist. He knows how hard it is to walk in God's way consistently and how beguiling the Devil's temptations can be. So to Christians seeking to 'sow to please the Spirit' he says, more gently, 'let us not become weary in doing good'. That is a feeling familiar to us all – often when we get a negative response to trying to love and care for others, we are sorely tempted to give an unkind response or to disobey God in some other way, rather than seeking that wonderful fruit of the spirit, self control. That is what will reflect to others that the Kingdom – the rule – of God is near and we don't have to do any great heroic deeds to achieve this.

We just need to persevere with St Paul's final instruction: 'as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers'. There are two things that strike us about this – first, again, is St Paul's sense of reality – 'as we have opportunity' – we don't have to

manufacture situations where we can do good to people. Rather, they will arise quite naturally in our day-to-day lives. Several times each day we will have to make a choice: do I do or say something good for someone else, or do I pass on the other side?’

We all know the times recently when we have let opportunities to do good pass by. God is saying to us today: ‘I put those opportunities in your way – use them. Show that the Kingdom – the rule of God is near.’ The second thing to strike us about St Paul’s final sentence is his encouragement to do good, **especially** to those who belong to the family of believers. This may seem quite wrong: surely we are going to show God’s love better by reaching out to those who do not believe, rather than looking inwards to our Christian brothers and sisters? The reason St Paul tells us to take the opportunity to do good, especially within the family of believers, is because we often do not. Family members can quarrel with each other, and our Christian family is no exception.

A close relationship makes for a more emotional response, and a lot of our doing good within the Christian family will be in forgiving, as well as in giving practical support. You would be surprised how fascinated the world is by the church. They react with scorn to any hypocrisy they see, but they are also admiring and moved when they see love and care among Christians. It is a reaction recorded by Tertullian back in the Third century when he wrote of unbelievers saying with amazement ‘See how those Christians love one another’. This was one of the things that caused the Church to grow during those early centuries and it can still be so today: for people want to belong to a group that is accepting and caring.

Also, deep down, all of them have the question ‘what happens when I die?’ and their Christian faith says firmly that believers will inherit the heavenly Kingdom of God, reap eternal life and rejoice that their names are written in heaven. The opportunities that we take to do good send a message for this world and for the next.

AMEN

Father Roger Walker

3.7.16