

The 4th Sunday After Pentecost, July 6, 2025
St. Andrew's Church, Kitchener
Holy Communion/Eucharist, 8:00 a.m./10:00 a.m.
Revised Common Lectionary (Yr. C, Pr. 14): **Luke 10:1-11, 16-20**
Preacher: Gerry Mueller

The old-timers here, meaning those attending KW Anglican churches in the 1970's and 80's (and I guess I am included in that group) might remember Bishop Morse Robinson, 5th suffragan bishop of Huron, and Area Bishop for the Eastern part of Huron from 1974 to 1987, when he retired. He went on to found the Renison Institute of Ministry, and led it for 15+ years, turning it into the treasured resource for laity eager to learn about their church and faith that it still is today. **Personally**, Bishop Morse was the first bishop I spoke to about ordination, and he quietly guided me through the half-decade it took to turn a chemical engineering professor into a baby priest, and I was honoured that he was one the clergy laying hands on me at my priestly ordination. A dozen years later he was part of the committee that chose me to become Chaplain of Renison University College and to the University of Waterloo.

Bishop Morse spent much of his ministry as a bishop and in retirement encouraging a renewed ministry of the laity. He encouraged laity to recover their proper liturgical functions, and also their proper ministries of pastoral care, outreach, and evangelism in the wider world. Such efforts were sometimes not appreciated by both parties affected: paradoxically, **some** clergy felt threatened; it would "take away their authority and work;" and some lay people saw it as a plot by the clergy to lighten their

load! Bishop Robinson, with wry fondness, recalled a particularly awful example of the latter.

At a Great Chapter, what is now a Deanery Council, he spoke on the importance of laity participating as liturgical ministers. He listed some of the ancient liturgical functions: greeters, readers, cantors, leaders of prayer, eucharistic ministers, all traditionally belonging to lay people. He also emphasized the ministry of lay people in the world. Strengthened by their participation in Sunday worship, they were to visit the sick and shut-ins, care for one another, share their faith by bringing the Good News to others in deed and in word. After he had finished there was a **pregnant** silence. Finally, a prominent lay woman pronounced on the whole issue. "When I go to church on Sunday, what I do is between me and God, and as for ministry in the world, I **pay** that man," pointing in the direction of the rector of her parish, "I pay **that** man to do all that **for me!**"

An unknown (to me) theologian suggested that the only really new heresy of the 20th century was what they called, "Salvation by observation," of which this is a good example. Fortunately, in the 1/3rd or so century since we have largely gotten over this, although pockets of that sort of thinking may still remain. And as we as a parish look forward to a period of change, and of refining and redefining our future, it's maybe worth looking at the part everyone has in that future.

Today's reading from St. Luke's Gospel is a text that speaks very much to the ministry of the **laity**, the ministry of all the baptized. In our Church and in others, even some that no longer have bishops, the ordained **clergy** are seen as the successors to the **apostles**, that inner group whom Jesus commissioned and the Holy Spirit empowered to lead the new Church. For Anglicans and others this succession is expressed by the laying-on of hands with prayer by someone who was also ordained in this way, supposedly all the way back in an unbroken chain to the apostles themselves, or at least back to when historical records are first available. That's very early and why we say that Anglican bishops are part of the "historic episcopate".

But **today's** Gospel text, which tells of the sending out by Jesus of seventy-two (seventy in some translations), **commissioned** to preach and heal, very clearly **excludes** the apostles. Listen closely to the first sentence:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two **others** and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. (Luke 10:1)

Clearly, Jesus appointed seventy-two **others**, outsiders to the **inner** circle of the apostles, to go and proclaim the coming Kingdom, and to heal. In **today's** language, Jesus sent out seventy-two to preach, teach, and do pastoral care work. And just as clearly, these seventy-two did not later become part of the dozen plus apostles

who were the first, in **our** words, ordained **clergy**. They were lay ministers, again using today's language, and I'd like to suggest that they form a prototype of the ministry of all the baptized - the ministry of all who follow Jesus.

Christians are **made** ministers at their baptism. They **renew** that obligation at confirmation, **again** at every baptism at which they renew their baptismal vows, and **again** at every Holy Eucharist when they come forward to receive Holy Communion, and are fed to do the **work** of Christ. If you are **baptized** you are a Christian **minister**. To restrict ministry to the clergy is to lose sight of that **fact**. It also **perverts** the nature of the ministry of the ordained clergy.

What then is the ministry of the **ordained**? Chiefly to **ensure** that the ministry of all the baptized is guided, nourished, and facilitated. St. Paul puts it very well in his Letter to the Ephesians, writing of the gift of the Holy Spirit given to those who hold special office in the Church:

... his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the **saints** for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12)

That's the only reason for the ordained clergy, to **equip** the **saints** - that's **you**, all the baptized - to **equip** you for the work of ministry. Apart from the ministry of **all** the baptized, the ministry of the clergy has **no** valid reason for existence. The ministry of

the ordained is not something that exist in a vacuum; it exists as **only one** of the many ministries of the Christian **community**, and the reason for the ministry of the ordained exists is to **empower**, and **instruct**, and **inform** the ministry of the entire **community**.

If you take all that seriously, then it leads to a very different vision of the Church than we had in the past; one toward which we are still working. The past assumptions are of a Church in which a kind of "super-priest" is in charge of comforting all the afflicted, afflicting all the comfortable, healing all the wounded, teaching all that needs to be taught, managing all that needs to be managed, liturgizing all of the liturgy, and evangelizing the unchurched and bringing them into the fold - preferably in large numbers! The laity is confined to providing the money and the odd bit of moral support. That, folks, is a prescription for **burn-out**!

The new vision is one of a church in which all do pastoral care of one another, visiting those who are sick, or alone, and on the margin - but most of all, **each other**. It is a church in which all are **evangelists** - sharing in word and in deed the Good News of Jesus Christ which has transformed their **own** lives, and willing to help others transform **theirs**. It is a church that grows, because its members are so obviously empowered and renewed by their **faith**, that others, when invited to come, are eager to do so. It is a church in which Jesus Christ makes a visible **difference** in the

lives of the members, a difference so **visible** that others are attracted to share it.

It is this later part, evangelism, that is for me the most exciting part of this vision of the Church. "Evangelism" has had a bad name among Anglicans - it has a connotation of pushiness and annoying demands for money - but really, it only means sharing, in deed and in word (that order is important), the Good News of Jesus. If your Christian faith really **transforms** your life, you have a great ability to convert others. Christians are made by **other** Christians - you are a Christian because some other Christian **persuaded** you to be one. Let me illustrate:

The great preacher, Phillips Brooks, asked why he was a Christian, pondered for a while, and said, "I think I am a Christian because of my **aunt** who lives in Teaneck, New Jersey."

Canon Thomas Tallis said, "A Christian is someone who **knows** one."

Madeleine L'Engle writes, "If I have faith it is because I have met faith; I have seen it in action. And this faith is never a vague, pie-in-the-sky kind of thing but made real in a **person** of faith."

And if I am honest about my own journey in faith, I am a retired priest still active in doing the work of the ordained, rather than being a fully retired chemical engineering professor, because of Terry Lindon, a Holy Cross Order Roman Catholic priest, who reached out to me in a time of difficulty, and brought Christ to me.

Finally, you might want to note, that some recent research into church growth has shown that about 80% of the people who joined a church did so because someone who was already a member asked them to come and worship with them!

Jesus sent out seventy-two. Seventy and seventy-two are among those biblical symbolic but not exact numbers, meaning a large but not huge number. On this Summer Sunday, that's not far from our own numbers. When those seventy-two came back, they could not believe the miracles they had accomplished, and because of their work Jesus said that he had, "watched Satan fall from heaven."

I am not Jesus, merely his unworthy servant. However, I challenge you to go out, to share the Good News of Jesus, that has brought **you** here this morning. Share, in deed and word, the Gospel of Jesus. Live out your baptismal ministry. You will be surprised what that will do for the building of the Kingdom.