

## Being Sent Out

Barbara Brown Taylor relates this conversation she had with a college graduate who desired to be ordained in her book, *The Preaching Life*:

"He was an articulate Christian who had been active in campus ministry and deeply influenced by the Episcopal chaplain at the school. He was bright, committed, and knowledgeable about the faith, but as he talked I grew perplexed. He did not want to serve a church, did not think he would like being held accountable by a denominational body, and was not attracted to a ministry of the sacraments, although he did believe he would like to preach once a month or so.

"Then why do you want to be ordained?" I asked him. He thought a while and finally said, "For the identity, I guess. So I could sit down next to someone on a bus who looked troubled and ask them how they were without them thinking I'm trying to hustle them. So I could walk up to someone in the street and do the same thing. So I could be up front about what I believe, in public as well as in private. So I would have the credentials to be the kind of Christian I want to be." His honesty was both disarming and disheartening. God help the church if clergy are the only Christians with "credentials," and God help all those troubled people on the bus if they have to wait for an ordained person to come along before anyone speaks to them." (Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, Cowley Publications, 1993 p. 25ff)

The attitude of this college graduate is very much different than that of the 70 disciples that Jesus sent out ahead of Him. While the 70 disciples, that college graduate and even ourselves have been sent out by Jesus; we and the college student want to have a 'safety net' if things don't work out, or we want to have the 'right credentials' so that we can speak publicly about our faith in Jesus

Christ. This is quite unfortunate because we actually do have the "credentials" that we need whether we realize it or not. In Jesus' instructions when He sent the disciples out, He told them that when they enter someone's house, they should offer God's peace to the person. We are cautioned that there is no guarantee that the person you greet will welcome you. In fact, it can be downright tough going to others to tell them about the coming of the kingdom of God. But that is the only 'credential' we need - offering the peace of God.

In today's world, we have become afraid to speak publicly about Jesus for the most part. In the public forum, it is okay to talk about God in general terms, but as soon as we become specific about Jesus, things change. When I lived in New Jersey, I was listening to the radio in the morning. The radio show hosts were talking about a subject I don't remember and they were taking phone calls from listeners. One caller had mentioned in general terms about the friendship that Jesus brings to people. As soon as the caller mentioned "Jesus," he was disconnected. This kind of attitude demonstrates the thought that religion belongs only in the private realm and not in public conversations. In the words of today's Gospel reading, the offer of God's peace is being rejected by those who are being met. The result of pushing talk about Jesus out of the public conversation is that Christians have largely retreated to their church buildings. We have separated our lives into two parts - our secular life that we live from Monday to Saturday and our religious life that we live on Sunday. Some have even compartmentalized it further that relegates our religion to a one-hour block on Sunday morning. Some people have even turned it around and do not let that one-hour block encroach on anything else. If it appears that the one hour might extend into "overtime" or "extra innings" of another 15 minutes or half an hour, then they would just as soon forfeit the whole hour and sleep in or do something else. Let me

be clear, I'm not talking about those people whose jobs require them to work on Sunday or have other responsibilities that prevent them from attending worship services on Sunday.

People come to church for many reasons. Among those many reasons are: this is where we feel safe talking about God and Jesus; it is a place, where for at least an hour, we really can experience God's kingdom here on earth. But, in giving our witness to Jesus in this setting, we are "preaching to the choir," playing it safe. Jesus wants us to take risks, to try, to engage others in spreading the good news about the kingdom of God.

"There was an old farmer, rugged and barefooted, who sat on the steps of his tumbledown shack, chewing on a stem of Timothy grass. He was approached by a passing stranger searching for a cool drink of water. Wishing to start a conversation and get acquainted with this farmer, the stranger asked, "How is our cotton coming in this weather?" "Ain't got none," replied the farmer. "Didn't you plant any?" asked the frowning stranger. "Nope," said the farmer, "fraid of weevils" "Well," asked the newcomer, how is your corn?" "Didn't plant none," replied the man, "fraid there warn't goin to be no rain." "Really, what did you plant?" asked the puzzled man. "Nothing," said the farmer. "I jest played it safe!!!"

This is what many congregations do, they play it safe. They are afraid of being rejected, of the "weevils" that come to attack the seeds that are sown or are afraid there won't be enough "water" to help the seeds that were planted grow so that they wind up doing nothing, staying comfortable within the four walls of the church building. Jesus knows that things will not be easy for those who proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. An amazing thing happened, however, for those 70 who went out and did what Jesus told them to do. They found that they had

the ability to proclaim the good news and they saw the positive results of this. They returned to Jesus with joy at what they did in Jesus' name.

When Jesus wants to send us out into the world to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near, how will we react? Will we go, strong in the conviction that we will not fail, even if our message is rejected by some? Will we be hesitant to go, feeling the stares of the "wolves" not sure if we want to take the risk? Will we not go at all, preferring to play it safe and wait for them to come to us? These are questions we need to answer, both as individuals and as a congregation. How will we answer Jesus?

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/EWr9PbfDi78>

Service: <https://youtu.be/MRWD7rhFVds>