

If we had more time, I could list many more examples of the way God still sends out workers for God. I could name names of those who today are numbered among the 70, the 10,000,070, the 70,000,000 that Jesus has commissioned. This is the way this God gets done what this God wants done.

In our Epistle reading, Paul addresses various controversies at the church in Galatia, urging the church to ensure that the **main thing** is the **main thing**: *“bear one another’s burdens - in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.”* (Gal 6:2)

For Americans, today, (4th of July) is their day of celebration of national independence. **Freedom and independence** are noble virtues important also to us Aussies.

Yet today’s Gospel moves us to celebrate another set of virtues:

- **dependence** (on Christ),
- **obedience** (to Christ),
- and **yoked service** (to Christ) are even greater virtues.

There are Sundays when we gather and read some strange passage of scripture that is difficult to understand, maybe even difficult to believe. This Sunday is different. This Sunday I’ve got undeniable, living proof of the truth of this scripture – you!

Amen!! Thanks be to God!!

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A Message from Mark!

Christians Commissioned

4 July 2010 – Pentecost 6

Scripture: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Theme *Jesus graciously refuses to work alone. He enlists ordinary women and men to work with him. He commissions people to work with him in his salvation of the world. Jesus doesn’t just call people to him; he sends them out to do his work in the world. For those who obey his summons and do his work, God’s reign draws near.*

I was visiting with Daniel at the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention centre. I was listening to his plight back in Nigeria and trying to understand his story before reminding him about our hope in God and serving him communion.

While on this visit I got to know another volunteer as we waited for security clearance. I told her that I was there because I was a Christian. This was the sort of thing we thought we were to do. She told me that she was a Buddhist and that she had immigrated to Australia from Thailand. Why was she volunteering, I asked? *“I worked so hard to be an Australian citizen, she said. I am so grateful to be in this country. I thought that some volunteering was the least I could do. It’s my little way of giving back some of that which was given to me.”*

Even as a Buddhist, I think she could be an illustration of this morning’s Gospel. Jesus calls a group of people to him. We are all here this morning because we feel that Christ has called us to himself. Christ has done things for us we could not do for ourselves, namely he has gifted us with fullness of life and made us part of his reign. He generously bestows upon us gifts of peace, joy, compassion and purpose.

And yet this morning's Gospel reminds us that those who are called to Christ are commissioned by Christ. He sends out 70 (a much larger number of people than the original 12 disciples) and he commissions this crowd to do the same things that he does in the world. Jesus heals and teaches, preaches and saves, but he never does this by himself. Right from the first he commissions people to do the very same work that he does in the world. Jesus "co-missions." He doesn't work alone. His mission is a cooperative mission and so is ours.

I wonder if most of us, when we think of Christ, think of all the good things he gives us, when, according to today's Gospel, we ought also to be thinking of all the good things he gives us to give to the world.

Let me ask you: What gift has Christ given you, not just to enrich your life, but so that you might bless the lives of others? How and where do you think Christ has commissioned and sent you to work in his name?

Jesus gives the 70 difficult and challenging work to do in the world. They are not to burden themselves with a lot of baggage. They are to expect rejection and resistance. It won't be easy. In other words, they can expect to receive some of the same rejection to their service of Jesus that Jesus himself receives.

Tough warnings. And yet, Jesus says that in them God's reign is coming near. We often pray on Sundays, "***your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***" In these ordinary people, called to do extraordinary work, the reign of God is coming near to the world. The petition of The Lord's Prayer is being fulfilled, though them! The 70 return with joy – joyful that they have actually witnessed the reign of Jesus taking visible form through them.

Do you believe this morning's Gospel? I do, and you are partly responsible. You have helped to teach me the truth of Jesus' promise. I've seen this scripture for myself. I have seen you encountering great difficulty in your daily lives. I have seen some of you evoke the world's resistance. I've seen you have to admit failure and have to move on to other tasks.

And yet, praise God, I've also seen you as visible evidence of Jesus' power over death and dead ends and Jesus' commissioning of ordinary folk to do some extraordinary Godly work.

Sometimes we preachers are guilty of preaching the reign of God as if it were an exclusively future possibility rather than a present day reality. ***Someday, sometime we shall see God at work, but (by implication) not here, not today.*** My friends, I see plenty of evidence around here to refute that exclusively futuristic view of the reign of God.

In the ICU ward on Tuesday as I sat with a former President of Vanuatu keeping vigil by his sick wife's side, two good friends patiently supported his prayerful three week vigil. They all rejoiced in some hopeful news for the family of a fellow patient and were delighted as I read from James 5 and anointed their loved one who was in a deep coma.

On Wednesday I saw again the patient and practical loving of our wonderful volunteers who make our Friendship Club ministry possible. Drivers providing a lift, music to entertain, a hot lunch to enjoy, and most importantly, caring companionship to break up a lonely week for these dear old folk.

On Thursday, I took an after hours welfare call. A kind staff person from Centrelink referred her client to us. When 23yo 'Gina' (not her real name) arrived, it was apparent she was being supported by a student friend. Wiping her tears, she told of being kicked out of her fundamentalist Christian Samoan home and sleeping at the airport. Because you help to finance and make possible our commitment to minister to human heartache and practical needs, these two left 40 minutes later with a box of groceries, a couple of bags of warm clothes (from our Op Shop team) and a prayer for a brighter future.

These are but a sample of the ways that ordinary people are the living embodiment of today's Gospel in our community - living proof that Jesus still commissions and empowers ordinary people to be signs of the nearness of the reign of God!