

Our reading from Luke this evening can seem on first examination a bit of a dog's breakfast. In only 17 verses, we have the mission of the twelve, Herod's perplexity, and the feeding of the 5000. What is the connection? It certainly is not immediately apparent. Did Luke just have three bits he had not found a logical place for? In fact, there is very significant connection among these three pericopes, but one must dig to make the connection. The theme is in fact, the nature of faith and its fragility.

The mission of the twelve is a powerful story especially if we remember who they were: 5 were fisherman; 1 was a tax collector; 1 was a zealot; 1 was a money man; 1 was a carpenter; 3 we don't know what their work was. None of them were rabbis; none of them were educated; none of them had social standing. None of them were obvious candidates to preach about the Kingdom of God, and none were obvious candidates to bring healing from disease and to banish demons. And do bear in mind that the 12 are the Apostles chosen only 2 chapters before from among a very much larger cohort of disciples. But God and his Son do not choose the obvious.

God chose Moses, a fugitive and former murderer with a speech impediment. As directed by God, did Samuel chose the older sons of Jesse – the Sons that were mature,

physically imposing, and well prepared to do battle? No, Samuel chose the youngest and the slightest son, David. God chose Gideon a fear-filled farmer who was in hiding to lead a mere 300 men to defeat an entire army. God chose Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute in the doomed city of Jericho to aid the Israelite spies. She was grafted into the lineage of Jesus. And God choose a poor, unwed teenager, Mary, to become the blessed mother of the Christ. And the Christ chose the twelve none of them any more likely.

The point is that God never calls without giving the strength to meet the call. As you heard in the reading, the twelve were enjoined to take nothing with them because God would provide. So the first gift they were given was the ability to trust in God in the most challenging circumstances. And what did the twelve from their humble backgrounds have to triumph over demons and disease? The authority and power of the Son of Man given to them in their call.

Taking nothing with them echoed the rule of the time that rabbis could not enter the Temple with a staff, with shoes, or a moneybag because they could not be there for other business but only serving the Lord. Similarly it was the rule for Jews if they had been in Gentile territory as soon as they passed through they were to shake the dust of their feet. So the 12

were to do if they encountered a place where they were not welcome.

But stop for a moment and think of the power of the Apostle's faith for we know that all the power and authority that Jesus gave them were as nothing if they didn't have the faith and trust in Jesus. When one is called one has to accept the call and believe in it.

Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee was perplexed when reports of Jesus activity reached him. Jesus could not be John the Baptist because Herod had had John beheaded and presented his head on a tray to Salome his niece and stepdaughter. Others believed that Jesus was Elijah or one of the early prophets miraculously returned to earth. Herod was curious and more than a little concerned that Jesus could be a threat to his position as the Roman sponsored ruler of Galilee. Like the Chief Priests and other members of the Sanhedrin, Herod held his position entirely at the discretion of the Roman overlords. Any disruption could threaten Rome's patience with them. Herod's curiosity was real, but it was not occasioned by spiritual insights or a desire to strengthen a relationship with God. It was a curiosity of a narcissist only interested in how a phenomenon could have impact on himself and how he could temper its effect and

possibly even eradicate it. Witness his conduct when he finally meets Jesus on the morning of the crucifixion.

The feeding of the 5000 comes out of the power of faith and the fragility of that faith. The Apostles return to Jesus full of the joys of all they were able to accomplish going *through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere*. But the Apostles notwithstanding their very recent and very unlikely success do not have the imagination in their faith and full confidence in their faith that God will provide. They have just been on what was by all accounts a successful several days long mission on which they took nothing for their sustenance. Not only did they survive; they flourished. God did provide. But even fresh from that experience, they are unable to transfer the lesson to a different circumstance. God provides and God provides abundantly. There were twelve baskets of leftovers after the 5000 had eaten their fill.

Give them their due, however. In the next pericope after our reading echoing the pericope with Herod, *Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” Then he said to them,*

“But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.”

So what is the message for us? Remain open and alert for a call. Have faith that if you are called, God will provide you with what you need to fulfill it – provided you remain faithful to it. Such faith is not easy to develop but oh so easy to lose. Faith requires work, work that is never done. There is always more: new calls, new circumstances all of which can require adaptation and broader thinking. The Apostles were not being unkind when they wanted to send the multitude away. They were concerned for their well-being. They couldn't make the connexion that Jesus who sent them out *with neither staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money, not even an extra tunic* ensured that their needs were met. That Jesus could also ensure that the multitude would be fed out of God's abundance.

Real faith is saying yes to a call as opposed to a horrified “Who Me!” The Apostles accepted the call and were focused on others, those to whom they brought the Good News, those whom they healed, and those who they thought were in danger of hunger. Herod could only interpret from what he was hearing to focus on self-protection, highly developed and merciless CYA procedure.

The Apostles demonstrate that building faith for oneself and for others is a timeless never-ending exercise. Please God we do not come to church for Herodian self-protection, but for a mission like that of the Apostles – always for the love of others.

May we be like the person in Isaiah: *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”*

Amen