

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Last Sunday we dispatched Kyle Nelson to his new congregation. We didn't call him, but we bid him farewell and wished him Godspeed. Today, we do something similar with Erik Saunders and family, not with a rite — there's no sending rite for vicars in the Agenda — but with prayer and wishes for God's blessing. They follow in a long procession of those who have been sent before them, for they follow in the example of Jesus in our Gospel.

Today, we hear in the Gospel how Jesus appointed seventy-two of His disciples — they were seventy-two “*others*” the text says; different ones whom Jesus identified and sent out with a commission. Different than whom? Than the twelve. In the previous chapter, Jesus called the twelve to him, gave them authority over demons and power to do miraculous healings, and sent them out with a commission “*to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal*” (Luke 9:2). And they did.

The class we hear about today is six times bigger — Jesus needed laborers for the harvest. This class was perhaps not as schooled as the twelve whom Jesus had called and who had been with Him from the beginning. He was concerned also with the “*wolves*” they might encounter. These vicars He sent out in pairs, but the commission was quite similar: “*Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ... And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide ... Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you.’*”

These vicars were sent in the place of Jesus, going to the cities Jesus would later visit, proclaiming what Jesus told them to proclaim — not their word but Jesus' word. “*The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me*” Jesus' word begins with “*peace*” — peace with God.

It's what Jesus came to establish by His cross. “*God, ... through Christ reconciled us to himself,*” St. Paul says. Again, “*in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them*” (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Or again, St. Paul says, righteousness “*will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rom. 4:24-25; 5:1). Because of Jesus, God no longer counts our sins against us. God looks upon us favorably, as we look to Jesus in faith.

Thus, these disciples were sent out with this “*ministry of reconciliation,*” sent with a “*message of reconciliation*” (2 Cor. 5:18-19). “*Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’*”

Jesus also instructed the disciples to proclaim: "*The kingdom of God has come near to you.*" This is the same message that Jesus Himself proclaimed in His ministry. This kingdom comes by the very presence of Christ, the Son of the Father Himself, sent down from His side. This kingdom comes by believing in Jesus, and this faith is accompanied by repentance.

Repentance is a hard word. It implies acknowledging that you've sinned, that you are not righteous on your own, that you fall short of the glory of God, that you need forgiveness, that you need Jesus. It means humbling yourself before God, beating your breast, and saying, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*" As Jesus said, "*the one who humbles himself will be exalted*" (Luke 18:13-14). And Jesus is always there with forgiveness.

A lack of repentance is deadly serious, for this is what initiates the use of the binding key in the Office of the Keys. It's not dishonoring your father or mother; it's not murdering or adultery or stealing; it's not lying or slandering someone; it's not coveting. It's refusing to repent, as the catechism teaches: forgiveness is withheld from "the unrepentant as long as they do not repent" (Small Catechism, What is the Office of the Keys?). This is serious business, for the call to repentance is Jesus' call, and refusing to repent is rejecting Jesus; moreover, Jesus says, "*the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*"

On the other hand, heeding the call to repent brings with it the refreshing words of absolution and, with that, the comforting words "Go in peace" (LSB, Individual Confession and Absolution) from the ambassador of Him who Himself was sent as the Prince of Peace, sent into our flesh to bring peace to sinners, who by His cross and resurrection won that peace for us, and who by His Gospel and sacraments delivers it to us.

Moreover, He who was sent, sent out the twelve, and sent out the seventy-two others, and continues to send. He said it to the church on the evening of His resurrection — that's how we understand it: "*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you*" (John 20:21). With these words, the church joins in Jesus' commission to bring peace to the world — not to earn it for that had been done already ... once for all time, for all people, everywhere, but to deliver it by the sacrament of Holy Baptism, by preaching whatever Jesus commanded us, especially repentance for the forgiveness of sins, by bringing His kingdom ever nearer, feeding His disciples with His very body and blood in the supper He gave us.

Matthew 28 is often called "the Great Commission," given to the church. But this is not some new commission or a different commission. This sending of the church is the continuation of Jesus' sending, and it is a joining in His commission: in your

going, make disciples by baptizing and teaching; and He promises that He will be with us — like especially in the Lord's Supper.

These two references — John 20 and Matthew 28 — have always been considered by the church as constitutive of the Office of the Holy Ministry. Jesus says it to the church, and the church authorizes pastors to baptize, preach, forgive sins, and serve the sacrament on her behalf. And that's what Erik is being sent off as vicar to continue his training for. We pray that God will bless him in this vicarage year. Godspeed. We'll look forward to his informal report when he returns. We pray that it will be filled with joy, like that of the seventy-two.

And we pray for the continued ministry here at Zion and throughout our Synod, that it may remain faithful to Jesus' commission, not so that "*the spirits are subject to [us], but*" so that we may always "*rejoice that [our] names are written in heaven.*"

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.