

## Sermon Proper 9 Year C

Inspiration can be a very effective tool. I have been inspired in many ways. Certain speakers, like Martin Luther King, have inspired me to believe that this can be a better world and we humans can make it so. Certain works of art, paintings, music, dance, theater, literature have had the same effect of inspiring me. I tend to view inspiration in relationship to change. One gets inspired to make things different from what they are. I tend not to think that one gets inspired to keep things from changing. In our Gospel today, Jesus has sent out 70 of those whom he has inspired to share the Good News. He made it clear to them that all might not accept what they were proclaiming. We do not know if anyplace that they might have gone was not receptive. What we know is that when they came back they were elated because they had been able to prevail even against demons.

Jesus responds to their elation by telling them that the power that they have received to prevail is authority granted to them by him. He says to them that nothing will hurt them, but that they should not rejoice. I am not a biblical scholar. I passed my courses in scripture by using a resource that could have been named for me, *The Bible for Dummies*. I note this because I might be incorrect in saying that this section where Christ says that this group who are happy about their success will be able to tread on snakes and scorpions could be the cause of crazy Christians handling poisonous snakes. The snakes are not the point of this for me. The point has to do with the realization that one's success in ministry is not personal success.

The joy felt by the 70 upon their return has to do with the power that they felt. Jesus reminds them that the power is not from them, but was given to them. It is too easy to think that what one does in ministry is evidence of one's personal piety or one's prowess. Ministry is not about how many people are in the congregation, how big the TV audience, or how big the budget. Ministry is about serving. Ministry is about others, not about the minister. There is a reason that those who will subsequently be priests and bishops are first ordained deacons. A deacon is a servant minister. A priest and a bishop are still deacons. They are still ordained to serve. St. Stephen who was killed by a group that included St. Paul is the patron saint of

deacons. Stephen was living out his faith by serving those in need, specifically in assisting widows.

All of us are called to servant ministry. It is in no way limited to those who are deacons. The 70 went out to serve Christ in visiting those places where Jesus might later go. Each of us has accepted the role of servant ministry.

We did this when we were baptized and we renew this promise each time we participate in a baptism when we pledge to seek and serve Christ in all people loving our neighbors as ourselves. From our pledge in our baptism we understand that we are doing the work assigned us by Jesus when we care for those in need. In serving them we are serving Christ.

AMEN