

10.15 am HC

3 July 2022

Galatians 6: 1-16; Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

I must confess that as I began to prepare today's sermon, I was distracted for a while by Wimbledon- it happens, this time every year!

On reflection though, I'm not sure if it was a distraction or an insight- you'll have to decide.

Anyway, I was watching the first-round match between Serena Williams, the most successful female player ever with seven Wimbledon titles, and Harmony Tan, who had never played at Wimbledon before, let alone against a champion on centre court. It was a huge contrast of styles – youth versus age, innocence versus experience, weakness versus strength. And it was impossible to call as the match swung between them until the score board read 1 set all, 6 games all and 5 points each in the final set tie break. You can't get more even than that.

At that stage, I thought that the power and drama of Williams, with her 120 mile-an-hour serve and her screaming and shouting, would win her the match, to the delight of the packed crowd.

But in fact Tan won, kept her head, played her own game, which was less about power and more about skill and strategy, and finally her seeming weakness triumphed over the power of Williams, who still received a standing ovation as she left centre court, probably for the last time..

Jesus has some interesting things to say about outward power versus skill and strategy, in today's gospel reading. This is a second 'sending out' account in Luke's gospel, after the twelve apostles are sent out two chapters earlier. Their sending, symbolically, was to the twelve tribes of Israel, the Jewish people. This sending is bigger and wider and the figure of 70, or possibly 72 in some manuscripts, represents every nation in the world. This is important in Luke especially, because as a Gentile convert to Christianity, he always emphasises that the good news is for all people and all nations.

But back to power- as Jesus commissions the 70, he describes them as 'lambs in the midst of wolves.' No question where the power lies here.

This image of a lamb takes us to Isaiah's description of the Messiah, like a lamb

led to the slaughter, dumbly accepting its fate. Similarly, Jesus' followers will go out in weakness and are also likely to face persecution and suffering. Jesus' instructions to go without purse, bag or sandals and to rely totally on others' hospitality re-emphasise the weakness that the disciples are told to assume, outwardly at least.

But as Jesus continues his instructions, the dynamic shifts a little.

The disciples must extend a greeting of Peace to each house they enter, and if that peace is rejected, leave rapidly, shaking the dust off their peace.

Now, the disciples are the bringers of God's peace, the Holy Spirit's presence, which they can bestow, or withhold, as messengers and servants of Jesus. And that means they hold incredible, heavenly power.

They are told to stay in the house where they are welcomed, eating and drinking, sharing their faith. This is a confident and measured approach to mission, investing time, building relationships, not rushing around trying to be popular. It takes courage to do this, to receive as well as give, to be the guest rather than the host. It is exactly what Jesus did in his three years of public ministry. I wonder if we forget this sometimes?

Outwardly, the disciples are in a position of weakness, but in reality they are empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit, to be channels of God's peace and messengers of the good news of Jesus.

They go empty handed but are given immense power.

They discover the truth of this only as they go out, in obedience and humility, following Jesus' instructions, then return to him rejoicing because they really have cast out demons, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Naturally the disciples, like all of us, are amazed by such miracles and begin to boast about them, but Jesus quickly puts this in perspective.

He, the Son of God from before the beginning of the world, who watched as Satan fell from heaven like a flash of lightning, he alone will be the one to rescue and redeem the world from Satan's grip.

Thus, his followers' dealings with demons are no more than an outworking of the power he gives them, nothing for them to boast about.

And so, he says, don't rejoice at this, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven, that God has chosen you to be partners in the work of sharing the good news and building the kingdom of God.

We too are partners with God in this work – sharing the good news and building the kingdom of God. That applies to every one of us, to every Christian, not just to those with dog collars, or who work for the church, those or are on PCCs, or readings rotas or who clean the church. No, it applies to *all Christians*- following Jesus is not about becoming a holy church huddle but about drawing close to Jesus, then being sent out to serve him.

We gather here on Sunday mornings to draw close and be fed, in word and sacrament, and also to be sent out, as the prayer we often say makes clear:

(p.13)

Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

So I'd like us to take a few moments as I close to consider where God is sending us to this week, and how we can live and work to his praise and glory...

Lets pause, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide our thinking and praying now.

Firstly, where will you spend your time this week?

Who will you spend time with?

Are you ready to be surprised by God, to meet new people or be in new situations?

Let's ask God to help us be ready for that, even if it's a bit uncomfortable.

And whether we meet new people or not, lets take time to listen, to them and to God as we pray silently during each day.

Let's seek to build deeper relationships rather than seeking popularity.

Let's intentionally go empty handed into each day, our hands open to receive and share God's compassion, love and truth, not with our hands tightly filled- with answers, or criticism, or bitterness or pride..

Sometimes letting go and placing those things at the cross of Jesus is very hard to do, but releases us to receive what God wants to give us.

Let us live this week humbly, outwardly weak perhaps, but inwardly strong in the strength which God alone gives.

I close with a prayer of Desmond Tutu, who knew all about the misuse of power, and about the power of God to save and bring change.

Goodness is stronger than evil;

Love is stronger than hate;

Light is stronger than darkness;

Life is stronger than death;

Victory is ours through Him who loves us.

Amen.