

“Christ Rules in the midst of You”

Jesus has His face set towards Jerusalem – to the cross – to His sacrifice to atone for the sins of the whole world. He’s still picking up speed from coming down the Mountain of Transfiguration – where WE heard the Father say – “This is my Son, my Chosen One; LISTEN TO HIM.”

Today, as WE LISTEN to Jesus, God’s beloved Son – He reveals to us a necessity. Yes, He must go to the cross – but His Kingdom must go forth – His Word must be preached – His peace must be given to all with ears to hear.

Set before us today is the sending of the 72. Seventy-two apostles, “sent ones” – “sent on ahead of [Jesus] ... into every town and place where HE HIMSELF was about to go.” But before they go – a prep talk. No, not a pep talk – a prep talk.

He prepares them by giving them the lay of the land. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” – 72 may sound like a lot (a lot more than 12 apostles) – but that is FEW when the harvest extends to the ends of the earth. Like our forefathers who picked corn by hand – standing there looking at the harvest – the task is daunting, at best.

But the task is even harder than it looks. “Go your way; behold (see what I’m sending you into!), I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.” The work is plentiful – and dangerous to boot.

Take no provisions with you. “Greet no one on the road” – hoping to get some roadside assistance. Go, and “whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’”

Those who are sent out must resolutely set their faces towards Christ – or else – they will be overwhelmed by the task – and their labor will be futile.

These men must venture forth with a reliance upon Jesus Christ – and Him alone. He who sends them will provide. They go forth in faith – a faith whose object is Jesus Christ alone, and the peace He promises and delivers. And that supplying of all their needs, He will provide through the “sons of peace.”

“Heal the sick in [the towns you enter] and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” It is not doctors and nurses He sends out – but common men. Again, the task at hand – what the Lord has given them to do – seems daunting. And IT IS, if they go out with faith in themselves, and their abilities to heal.

The medicine prescribed and they deliver is this – “the kingdom of God has come near to you.” That is, God’s ruling on the earth has come to YOU. Let’s say that even clearer – Jesus is here to heal you!

The Son of God is at work through these men to rule over their sicknesses and disease – to set them free from their sin and the devastating effects it manifests in their lives. And with these healings – a manifestation, a showing to all with eyes to see – that God Himself is at work here – His kingdom, His ruling in the midst of you.

A quick side note, if I may. When the Lord sent me to this town, to you – He did not command me to heal the sick – nor does He promise that His ruling in the midst of His people will always have a visible manifestation – that you will be healed of whatever ails you. If He did – our prayer list would be much shorter. But a prescription He has given – the medicine of immortality. More on that later.

“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.’” Even the little particles of their dirt will not go with you – for your reliance is not upon man – but upon me, the Lord your God.

And not just that – even the smallest bit of them and the dust associated with them – will not journey on with us – with Jesus – to the cross and grave – to the resurrection and ascension into heaven.

But that’s not all – the message continues! “Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.” God Himself has come to your house, your town – to rule over you – over your sin and death – but you would not.

To those who reject Him and His kingdom – one of the strongest preaching of the law, a potent call to repentance – “I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”

Woe to you who will not receive these men in my name! Woe to you who will not hear and believe my kingdom, my peace! Woe to you who will not live under my rule, my kingdom! For Christ Himself comes to them – to rule – to give peace – to heal them – so that they might receive all the gifts of His kingdom.

Now, fast forward to their return. The 72 “sent ones” return all giddy – “Lord, even the demons are subject TO US in your name!” HOLD ON there! “Behold” – everyone pay attention! “I have given you authority [to do all of this]” – I have given you MY AUTHORITY! “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject TO YOU, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Rejoice that – even as I sent you, I went with you. Rejoice that MY AUTHORITY has given peace to those who “hear you” – for they have heard my voice. Rejoice that I am ruling over you – your sins, your death – giving you my peace.

“The kingdom of God has come near to you.” Jesus comes to YOU today! Even now He rules over you – forgiving all your sin – banishing your death with His Jerusalem-cross-death. To you He gives His peace.

Standing in the midst of you, Jesus delivers to you His medicine of immortality. His Baptism cleanses you from all that haunts you. His Absolution sets you free from the guilt and shame that binds you. His Body and Blood is Christ ruling OVER you and FOR you.

“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects Him who sent me.”

Dearly beloved, “the kingdom of God” - Jesus – has come near to YOU. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.