

Jesus sends out the twelve Luke 9: 1-6 & Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12

What a huge responsibility Jesus had entrusted to the twelve disciples. Thus far, they had watched and learned. Now the time had come for them to stand up and deliver what they had been taught.

Can you remember the occasions you had to do something for the very first time? Maybe, starting a new job and walking into a strange office or being promoted and having the responsibility to tell others what to do. I certainly can, particularly my first day on the beat as a police constable in 1972 and the first time I presided here at communion nearly 50 years later.

On both occasions I was so thankful to be accompanied by a much wiser and more experienced person because despite the best of training over many months, truth be told, I wasn't confident that I would remember what I'd been taught to say and do or indeed whether I was worthy or not to have been given the power and authority which came with my new position.

That, I think, is why I have such empathy with the situation the original disciples found themselves in, but in their case, they did not have a wiser, more experienced colleague to call on and guide them. No, they were being tasked by Jesus to go out with someone equally wet behind the ears, so to speak.

No doubt they took comfort from the Ecclesiastes reading, which they probably knew, that two are better than one. My police training helped me understand that two witnesses give greater credibility to any account being told.

This would have been equally true for the new gospel they were to teach. And being together also meant they were able to offer mutual support as and when the need arose. And I'm sure as eggs are eggs that such support would have been needed.

These twelve men were not simply stepping out of a fishing boat or other familiar routine but truly stepping outside of their comfort zone and into the unknown. I imagine them full of anxiety and worrying that they would say or do the wrong thing and no doubt they would have been afraid of making mistakes that would keep them from sharing Jesus's good news. Indeed, fear often dries up our ability to speak.

They were probably worried about what they were going to say and how they would say it, and I wonder if they understood that in order to tell Jesus's story they would have to share their own story too; how they first encountered Jesus and the difference He had made to their life. Speaking about yourself is always an easy and natural place to start.

And that is precisely what candidates for ordination are initially asked to do today, to share their life story and by doing so, Jesus's story is revealed. It is also the place I would encourage you all to start from on those occasions when you are asked about your faith.

But Jesus also wants to toughen up the disciples against inevitable rejection and having to fend for themselves. He had started to share his life and work with them, and he needed to widen their experience in doing what he was doing and perhaps more importantly; to get them to put their trust in God to the same extent that he did.

He forbade them from taking anything with them, no staff, no bread, no money, no spare tunic nor even a bag, placing their trust solely in God. They would be entirely dependent on the people whom they stayed with or preached to.

Equally, or maybe more importantly is that by doing so they would be seen to be different to the many itinerant preachers that wandered around at that time because those preachers always held out a bag at the end of their time preaching for donations in just the same way as beggars did.

No, their trust in God had to be complete. Jesus gave them power and authority to proclaim the good news, to heal the sick, cure diseases and drive out demons. Unlike the itinerant preachers they were to be seen to live out what they preached. They were required not to just talk the talk – to evangelise. Nor even to just walk the walk – undertake mission, but to walk the talk. They were to do so after being with Jesus, walking with him, watching how he did things, learning the truth of what he was saying.

Jesus had trust and faith in them. Now it was their turn to return that trust by speaking out the truth of God's love from their heart, simply and sincerely and by demonstrating and showing the love they spoke about in their daily lives.

And they need not fear. If one of them should hesitate or stumble, his friend was there to help him because two are better than one. Together, they could defend themselves against both verbal and physical attacks. Two friends bound together by their mutual knowledge and love of Jesus.

The bottom line was that the disciples said what they said and did what they did not out of anxiety or any sense of competition with each other, but out of love. Jesus was saying, in effect, love has been behind everything I preach and teach.

Two thousand years on, it is now our turn, just like the original disciples to speak out the truth of God's love from our heart, simply and sincerely whenever the opportunity arises. Not only to speak about Christ's love, but also to simply demonstrate and show that love in what we do and how we do things in our daily lives.

That is what discipleship is all about.

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