

The Reign of God

Luke 10:1-20

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 3, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Jesus Himself speaks through those who are authorized to speak for Him. This is the result of the fact that Jesus is God in the flesh.

All ambassadors speak for the ones who sent them. Our ambassadors of the United States are appointed by the president and approved by the Senate. As a result American ambassadors around the world speak for the President and the Legislature of the United States of America. Because the President is the Chief Executive Officer of our republic the ambassadors of the United States speak to foreign governments on the President's behalf. If the President wants to deliver a message to a foreign government, but does not have the time to do it himself, he has the American ambassador to that government deliver the message on the President's behalf.

Sometimes the President will authorize the ambassador to negotiate agreements with the foreign government on his behalf. In order for the ambassador to do that, the President will grant special authority and instructions so that the ambassador may negotiate on the President's behalf. With his authority the ambassador speaks for the president and any agreements that he signs are backed by the president. But he does not willy nilly sign anything and expect the President to back him. The President has also given him instructions on how to conduct the negotiations. Therefore the ambassador already knows what is expected of him, what he is authorized to do and what he is not authorized to do.

Under this arrangement entire foreign policy can be executed without the direct involvement of the President, but with his approval and under his authority. It is the same as if the President himself negotiated the agreement.

That is how it is with the ambassadors of Jesus. The only difference is that Jesus is God. When He sends forth His ambassadors He goes with them. When His ambassadors perform their duties, Jesus may not be speaking directly to those with whom His ambassadors have dealings, but He is nevertheless there and speaking through His ambassadors. His ambassadors go out with His authority. He instructs His ambassadors as to how they are to perform their vocations. The representatives of Jesus are not authorized to do their vocation in a way other than the way that the Lord told them to do it. The representatives of Jesus speak for Jesus in such a way that when you listen to them, it is the same thing as listening to Jesus.

Take the seventy from Luke 10. Jesus authorizes them to have authority to heal the sick and preach that the Kingdom of God has come near. Jesus instructs them on how they are to carry out their duties. They are to enter a house and stay there. They are not supposed to go from home to home. They are to pray the Lord's peace on the home, etc. When the seventy go out to perform their duties anyone who listens to the seventy is listening to Jesus. Anyone who rejects the seventy is rejecting Jesus because they speak with His authority. Anyone who rejects Jesus rejects the One who sent Jesus.

So when Jesus takes up His royal duties in Jerusalem some will be judged by what He does there and some will be saved by what He does there. How do you know which category you fall into? How do you know whether or not you are among the saved or the damned? Well, Jesus has authorized certain individuals to speak on His behalf. When they come to you they will announce whether or not you are among the saved or the damned.

The seventy in Luke 10 were just such a group. They announced that the Kingdom of God had come near. What they meant by that was that the Kingdom of God had not yet come, but it was really close to coming. Jesus had set His face to go to Jerusalem, but He had not yet arrived. Jesus had not yet taken up His royal duties.

If Jesus still authorizes people to speak on His behalf today, they will proclaim that the Kingdom of God has come. Jesus has already entered Jerusalem. Jesus has already taken up His royal duties. Jesus right now sits on the royal throne of David and reigns over the house of Jacob forever. His Kingdom does not end.

In the book of 2Chronicles it records that when Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, he was in fact actually sitting on the throne of the Lord. The kings of Jacob reigned on God's behalf as His ambassadors. So also Jesus the royal heir of David sits on the Lord's throne at the right hand of the Father Almighty and reigns on the Father's behalf over all nations.

So are there individuals authorized to speak for Jesus whereby that if we reject them we wind up rejecting Jesus and the One who sent Jesus and if we receive them we wind up receiving Jesus Himself and by doing so the reign of God has come to us?

The answer is "Yes."

There are individuals whom God has appointed to speak on His behalf. There are individuals whom Jesus has appointed to speak on His behalf.

The most important group of such individuals are the apostles themselves. It is to the apostles that our Lord gave the commission to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It was to the apostles that the Lord gave the commission to instruct all nations in what He had commanded. The apostles went out into the world as the servants of Jesus, the Lord, and they spoke on behalf of the Master. The apostles are the chief slaves in the household of Jesus. If you want the Lord's treasures you must deal with an apostle. The Lord will not deal with you directly. If you try to deal with the Lord directly, you will meet only His judgment.

There are people who try to deal with God directly without making use of His ambassadors. Such people often try to commune with God in nature. They avoid the Divine Service and the preacher. Such people hate authority. They prefer their own thoughts while contemplating the lake or the mountain or the ocean. But what can the lake, the mountain, and the ocean tell you about God? At the most they tell you that He is powerful and intelligent and that is all. While the ocean testifies to the majesty of God and sometimes the ocean is pleasant and soothing indicating God's providence and mercy, the ocean is also capable of hurricanes and is filled with animals that are dangerous. The ocean routinely kills human beings. The mountains are no different. They look majestic, but they also routinely kill human beings in mudslides, rock falls, and exposure.

While nature is filled with God's providence it is also filled with His wrath. While you need it to rain, it can rain too much. While you need the sunlight, you can have too much sun. The creation administers the providence and wrath of God according to generally predictable principles, but not according to detail. In other words there are generally intelligent rules that you can follow in dealing with nature to ensure your own safety, but even following those rules does not guarantee your survival in nature. In fact nothing does. You will eventually die of something in nature whether rock fall or cancer.

What we need in the midst of all of this is an ambassador from King Jesus to tell us what His eternal attitude is toward us so that we have some word to cling to from Him in the face of all of the conflicting messages that we get from the world. Is God out to get me? Does God favor me? Will I rise from the dead after I die? These are questions nature will not answer. They are only questions which the

King Himself will answer. He answers those questions through His ambassadors. His chief and foremost ambassadors are the apostles. The apostolic word is the word of Jesus. If you listen to the apostolic word you are listening to Jesus Himself. If you ignore or reject the apostolic word, you are rejecting Jesus Himself. If you reject Jesus, you are rejecting the One who sent Jesus.

You cannot deal with Jesus without the apostles. There is no word of testimony apart from them. Just as the ancient business dealer did not deal directly with the master of the house to obtain his money, but rather with the chief steward of the house who was a slave of the master, so also you do not obtain the master's treasure directly from the master. He has appointed His stewards to that purpose. Those primary stewards are the apostles.

But they are not the only ones. There is also the seventy.

The seventy are not apostles. They do not write authoritative Scripture like the apostles do. And yet Jesus still tells the seventy that anyone who listens to them is really listening to Him. Anyone who rejects them, rejects Jesus and anyone who rejects Jesus rejects the One who sent Jesus.

That raises an interesting question. Are there others whom Jesus sends besides the apostles to speak on His behalf even today? And the answer to that question is "yes."

In Ephesians chapter four, verse eleven it stands written that Jesus gave gifts among men and those gifts include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Obviously the apostles and the prophets make the list, but pastors and teachers make the list. There is some debate as to whether the teachers in the list are the same thing as the pastors or something distinct, but either way pastors make the list.

Therefore I am an ambassador of Christ Jesus. I am not an apostle. I do not write authoritative Scripture. I am not the chief steward. You have access to the treasury of the Master in ways other than me, but you do have access to the treasury of the Master through me. That is the point of being an ambassador.

In fact that is the point of all authority which God bestows. We know this from His instructions to the chief authority on earth: fathers. He tells fathers not to make their children angry, but rather to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Unless God had specifically said it the commandment to honor our father and our mother means that we should not make our fathers and mothers angry, but in Ephesians 5 God specifically commands fathers not to make their children angry. This emphasizes how God understands authority. Authority does not make you the boss over something, like you are top dog and everyone caters to you because you are top dog. That is a sinful and selfish way of understanding authority. That is the way that child abusers and wife beaters understand authority. They think that authority is about them when God asserts that authority is really about the person being served. Fathers have authority for the good of their children not for the good of fathers. In order for fathers to be a blessing to their children, the father needs to have authority. He cannot be a blessing to his child without the necessary authority to do so. So also I cannot bless the congregation unless my Lord has given me the necessary authority to do so.

Now, it is clear from Ephesians 4:11 that pastors have authority to bless. Jesus has given them that authority. Therefore anyone who listens to a pastor is listening to Jesus Himself. Anyone who rejects a pastor, rejects Jesus and anyone who rejects Jesus rejects the One who sent Jesus.

Now, how do you know that I, John Sharp, am a pastor? I say that I am. The Missouri Synod roster says that I am. But I and the Missouri Synod roster can say whatever we want to say, how do you know that we are telling the truth?

Our Lord did not personally appoint me like He did the seventy, so have I usurped someone else's authority by standing here and preaching to you today?

In Acts 13 the Holy Spirit sets aside Barnabus and Paul for their missionary journey. The Holy Spirit therefore grants them the necessary authority to do what they did. Paul had a personal encounter with the Lord, but for Barnabus it is only the Holy Spirit that grants him authority to accompany Paul and assist in the preaching of the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit is resident on earth within Christian congregations. Wherever there are congregations of believers in Jesus on earth, the Holy Spirit is there. In Ephesians it is explicit that the members of the congregation are being built together into a holy temple where God dwells by His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is resident within the congregation. The congregation of saints is furthermore the body of Christ on earth. Every bit as much the body of Christ as the body of Christ that we eat in the Sacrament of the Altar. Since the congregation is the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit resides within her she has certain unique authorities that no other group on earth has. One of them is appointing pastors. If pastors indeed are called to preach and teach on behalf of Jesus then by definition the congregation must designate who is a pastor and who is not. You folks designated me a pastor. You had a call meeting and everything. You sent me call documents. You designated me with this authority and I am called by Jesus to use it to bless you. And bless you I do.

I have authority to tell you what the seventy told the people to whom Jesus sent them. They told people that the Kingdom of God was at hand because Jesus was still on His way to Jerusalem to assume His royal duties at the time when Jesus sent them. When Jesus sent me to Immanuel He had already assumed His royal duties and was exercising them. So I tell you that the Kingdom of God has come and what's more, it has come to you.

The Kingdom of God would have come whether you had me or not. The Kingdom of God would have come whether you believed it or not. The Kingdom of God comes on its own, but I have been sent to tell you that the Kingdom of God has come to you.

Therefore all healings in the congregation are the blessing of Jesus. All sins in the congregation are forgiven. All miracles in the congregation are from Jesus. You need no longer fear the power of the ancient serpent, that is the devil, or Satan. He has fallen like lightning from heaven. The Kingdom of God has come to you. Jesus has assumed His royal duties. He reigns over God's Kingdom and of His reign there is no end.

You need not doubt what I am telling you. Jesus has sent me to tell you. If you wish to check with the apostolic writings you may do so. They will tell you the same thing.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.