

*The Pastor writes*

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you! Today has been earmarked as the Diocesan Mission Sunday. This is a day when we remember the Great Commission that was given to the disciples to go out into the world and spread the good news of Jesus Christ. In India alone, there are over 2500 unreached people groups who have not heard the gospel. Around the world, over 2.5 billion people have not yet heard the gospel.

In the gospel passage from Luke, Jesus sends seventy-two people in pairs to go and preach the gospel in every town and village that he was about to go. He told them that the harvest was plentiful but the workers were few and therefore that they should pray to the Lord of the harvest to raise up more workers. The world is the same today as the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. Any kind of mission work always needs to begin with prayer. Secondly, we need to recognize that mission is primarily the Lord's work and we work in partnership with him in it. Jesus also sends the workers two by two showing that we too are to work in partnership with one another.

Jesus tells his disciples that he was sending them out like lambs among wolves. The commission to go out is from Jesus himself. Sending them out like lambs among wolves is an indication that their mission would be dangerous and they would be vulnerable to attack. They were going to face hostility as they went around preaching the good news. Jesus also forbids them to carry a purse, bag or sandals. This instruction is to keep them focused on the mission that they had to undertake. Ministry in Jesus name should have no hint of ostentation but should be one of austerity. The clothes and sandals were not to be the concern of the messenger as God was going to be their provider. Secondly, even though they were sent as lambs among wolves, God was going to be their good shepherd in protecting them. Jesus also tells them not to greet anybody on the way. This was symbolic of haste and dedication because they were committed to the cause with a single focus. 2 Kings 4: 29 may have been the influence here as Elisha tells his servant Gehazi to tuck his cloak into his belt and to take Elisha's staff and lay it on the face of the boy who was dead without greeting anybody on the way. The point again is there needs to be single mindedness about the mission of God.

Jesus then gives them further instructions about how they should make an entry into a house or town and also the appropriate manner to respond to their welcome. When they entered a house they were supposed to proclaim God's peace on that house. Even though they were sent among wolves, there is an expectation that there would be people who will receive the good news and therefore receive the peace which was pronounced. The search is for hospitality as well as a base for the operations. If a family opens their home it was better for them to remain in that home and be recipients of their hospitality rather than jumping from one house to another looking for a better place or better food. The messenger eats whatever is placed before them. The messenger as God's worker should be taken care of.

When they entered a town they were to accept the hospitality that was offered to them. They were to heal the sick and to preach that the kingdom of God was near them. In other words God's kingdom was in their midst through Jesus. If there was a negative response they were to shake the dust of their feet and move on. It was the rejection of the good news of the kingdom.

God calls us to be engaged in his mission by proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God. We have a big task that lies ahead of us and we are called to do this with his help. Jesus closes his instructions with a solemn word of judgment for those who reject his disciples. On judgment day Sodom, the most despicable of ancient Gentile cities and the symbol of unrighteousness will fare better than the city that rejects the kingdom message. May we be engaged in his mission in spreading the good news of God's kingdom knowing that he who called and commissioned us for this mission will help us in carrying it out.

*Shalom*

*Paul Swarup*

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