

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

Our Gospel reading for the Feast of St. Luke begins with the phrase, After these things. There is not a single word of Holy Scripture that is unimportant, and so it begs the question, After what things? After this, the Lord appointed 72 others and sent them ahead of him, two by two into every town and place where he himself was about to go. So after what things?

After our Lord had sent other messengers ahead into a Samaritan village where Jesus was rejected. He was rejected there because his face was towards Jerusalem. James and John asked if they ought to call down fire upon the village, and Jesus rebuked them and sent out for a different village. Along the way, he explains a little bit about the cost of following him, describing his fate on earth as having no home, no place to lay his head. And then he rebuked those who would go bury their dead before following him, who thought they needed to say goodbye to someone before following him, saying, let the dead bury their dead, and no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. So this is, at the same time, the most important thing, to follow Christ, Jerusalem, and also a great burden.

So it is after these things... After this rejection in Samaria, after two rebukes, one for the disciples willing and wanting to call down fire, and another for those who are not fully committed to him. It is after these things that Jesus appoints 72 men to go out before him and prepare his way, and tradition tells us one of these men is St. Luke. And immediately after our reading, Jesus says to these same men in the same speech a warning about being rejected, saying, if they will not receive you, you are to shake the dust off your boots as a testimony against them. He warns them that they will be rejected, and that when they are rejected, it is not them that is rejected, but the kingdom of God, for the kingdom of God has come near. Being rejected, suffering loss, and being hurt in this world is part of being under this rule of God. And so Jesus sends out 72 others to prepare the villages in his path. For he, the Lord, is coming, and they must prepare by repentance and faith.

And they are called the 70 others because they are not the 12s. The 70 sent are not the twelve disciples who go on to become apostles, but nevertheless they go with the same commission, for they are sent by Christ's authority and by Christ's power. And the first thing our Lord says to them in this ordination of sorts is that the harvest is truly great, for the laborers are few. And so it is also for us that this is our reality until Christ returns. The harvest is plentiful. God's people need pastoral care. You need pastoral care. And the world needs the gospel to be preached. But he also tells them that he is sending them out amongst wolves who are

intent upon destroying them. The labor of the harvest, the work of the office of the Holy Ministry, is to be done in the presence and threat of enemies. In the face of the demons, the Lord prepares a table in the midst of our enemies.

And those who are sent are not sent armed to the teeth. They're not sent to fight fire with fire, claw with claw. They are not equal to the wolves in tooth and claw. They, in fact, those who are sent, they are lambs themselves.

Your pastors need pastoral care. They need to hear the word of God. They need the gospel preached to them. They are not the king or the Messiah. And some of them do get killed. And despite all this, despite knowing what is going to happen to those men sent out, Christ still commands them to go. To carry no money bag, no knapsack or sandal, let alone any weapons to defend themselves, they are to live off the generosity and charity of those they serve. And in this way, they embody and are ambassadors of Christ himself. And they bear marks in their own flesh of his own office.

They are told to move with haste, greeting no one on the road, making no effort to make friends, but to go and do that for which they were sent, to preach and prepare the way for Christ. And the world rejects them as it rejected Christ. They have no place to lay their heads unless it is given to them by their brothers. They might be killed by the wolves as a reflection of the slaughter of the lamb who takes away the sin of the world, and yet they go. And finally, our Lord tells them that when they enter a house, they are to pronounce peace. Let your peace rest upon the house. T

hey are to pronounce peace to that house if one of the elect, a believer, a son of peace is there. For then peace will rest upon him, and if not, they will move on. They are not to waste their time trying to talk people into the faith, or selling the kingdom, or explaining how it is that God is good when people don't want him. If there is one of the elect there, however, the laborers are to remain there and work and water the seed that is the word of the Lord, living off of the people's generosity and not coveting other places. They are to take what the people give with gratitude as from God himself. They are to heal the sick and to pronounce that the kingdom of God has come. And so it is that St. Luke is very fit for this very purpose. Being a physician of the body, Christ also calls him to be a physician of the soul and to cure not just bodily ailments, but spiritual as well. They are to heal the sick. To pronounce that the kingdom of God has come, and this is all a

foreshadowing of the Holy Communion and the peace that passes all understanding that God will bestow through it.

As Christ, after his resurrection, will send out the twelve, ordain them and send them out to do this very thing, to bring the peace of God to the ends of the world. To be his ambassadors, he establishes the office of the holy ministry, and the ambassador pronounces the kingdom and its peace. And if that pronouncement is received, if it is believed, if it is confessed, then the ambassador and the one who receives it become a family. And they enjoy a table fellowship together. They receive and they enjoy a common peace, a common meal, a common Christ. And there is the kingdom of God. In the first place, we are the harvest itself.

As I said previously, we are in need of pastors to preach to us, to absolve us, to baptize our children, to feed us and give to us Holy Communion, to prepare us for the visitation of the Lord on that last day. As we draw nearer and nearer to Advent, we look forward to that coming of the last day of Christ when he comes not with grace and mercy in his wings, but with judgment. We must be prepared. Jesus is coming. You had better get ready. But that's not a message of terror. The fact that Jesus is coming as a judge upon this world should not scare us. It is a message of joy and peace because we know precisely who Christ is by the word spoken and preached to us by his ambassadors. He himself is the Prince of Peace who has come once to forgive our sins, to announce and to work salvation and atonement for mankind. And our sins are forgiven.

Thus we are also prepared; we ourselves, each of us, are sent by God as witnesses to our friends and our families and our neighbors, and are also called upon to support the work of the Church. And this is a holy obligation. You may not be called into the office of the Holy Ministry, but you are put into friends with friends, you are put into a family, you are put into a place, and you are called to witness and to prepare the way of the Lord. This is a holy obligation and it is a privilege.

And we are all to be prepared to suffer evil. What happens to the shepherd happens to the sheep. Knowing that God is with us, even as we conduct our work, we make our witness to this world and the presence of demons and under threat, and we do it knowing that God is with us and that he will work all things together for our good. Even if it means we are devoured, even if it means we are attacked and assaulted, even if it means our flesh is rent asunder, God will work it for our good. Yes, faith is always under attack. The church is always being assaulted on every side by the world. But you know what? Jesus lives. So this world and its life are fleeting and they're not important. They're not the most important. They're not the only thing we have to

worry about. Let them assault us. Let them harm us. So what? The harvest is ripe, and there is urgency to our work. There are wolves that prowl, and yet the work must be done. There is danger in our work, yes, but so also do we hear in the gospel the great comfort that even the demons submit to us in the name of Jesus. And they flee, and they run from the word of God and from Christian prayer. The good and gracious will of God is always done. So when you are assaulted, when you are attacked, when you are full of doubt and fear and your own sinful flesh assails you, drive back the demons with the word of God and with prayer.

The good and gracious will of God is done. You have peace in Jesus Christ. You are made a son of peace, a daughter of peace in the waters of holy baptism where Christ places his name upon you and calls you to be his beloved child. He makes you into a peacemaker whom God himself calls blessed. Satan himself, the prince of demons, also flees. He flees from you, he flees from this holy supper which we are about to receive. By word and sacrament, Satan himself is driven away and cannot harm you. The death of Jesus Christ in our stead has rendered him impotent. So his accusations are removed from us. The law cannot offend you, it cannot drive you away from Christ. Christ has fulfilled the law. He has done all things well. And you yourself are changed for and by the work of holy baptism. There God put his own name on you. He wrote your name in the book of life, and he commanded that you rejoice that your names are written there. What we have come here to receive, what is set behind me upon this altar, is a banquet of peace.

Spoken of in the Psalms, prepared in the presence of our enemies. And we do not here merely consume Christ. No, we also are consumed by him. He is not incorporated into us and made a part of our bodies. Rather, we are consumed by him and we are incorporated into his body, into his mystical body, the church, and in holy communion he makes us this very body. He knits us together into his own flesh. And so we say with a confident and loud voice, we do not belong to the wolves, we do not belong to the world, the demons have no hold upon us, Satan cannot claim us. Changed by grace, given authority over all the power of the enemy, we are prepared both for his visitation and also to be his witnesses. The Christian life looks forward to his return, but it also is concerned with now. And indeed, we are eager for both, for Christ lives. What have we to fear?

✠ In Jesus' name. ✠