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| Sermon |
| Year C , 3rd Sunday after trinity 6th July 2025 |
| **Sermon…. Priorities, taking risks and the blessings of the kingdom of God.**  In the gospel reading from today we hear how Jesus sends out 72 disciples, two by two, ahead of him, into every place he was about to go. They were an advance party, if you like, preparing the way for Jesus. Sent to heal the sick and to declare that the Kingdom of God had come near.  So why, you might wonder, does Jesus need the advance party? In the preceding verses, from chapter 8, we hear how Jesus has already been going out to the towns and villages to heal the sick, to teach and perform miracles. And then in chapter 9 we hear how he sent the 12 Apostles go out to do the same. But now a much larger group of disciples are sent out.  The 72, a number thought to representative of the nations of the world (or 70 depending on whether you’re reading Genesis 10, in Hebrew or Greek).  The detail of the number isn’t what really matters, what matters is that the kingdom of God, is being made known to the whole world; and the sense of urgency to Jesus’ mission, as he sets his face to Jerusalem and the cross. Jesus describing the task as being like a field at harvest time, full of food just waiting to be harvested. But the harvest needs more workers, otherwise the food will spoil. Something that, rural communities will be only too aware, with a harvest, could happen in a matter of days.  And to this send of urgency, we hear how the disciples must take no baggage, there is no time for anything that will weight them down; for ordinary courtesies, they simply don’t have time to win people over, persuading them; they are either in or out. Where they get a positive response, there the disciples must stay and preach the good news of the kingdom. But if there is a negative response they must move on immediately.  It sounds a bit like the TV reality game, ‘Race across the world’. Do you know it? A group of people, go out in pairs to far flung places of the world, with no technology (no mobile or internet!) and with limited funds (the cost of a one-way airline ticket), to cover all their expenses. The aim is to race the other teams to their next checkpoint and eventually the end.  The lack of technology is an obvious draw back, in the 21st century, (as would the lack of supplies have been for the disciples). There’s no checking timetables, booking hotels or tickets. But each season the couples realise the great blessings of being free from a reliance on technology and even the limited funds. Instead of staying in hotels, expensive when you rock up on the day, they find themselves staying with locals, spending time in their homes, eating whatever they are given; instead of consulting google they are forced to ask fellow local travellers for directions; lack of funds forces them to work, as they travel, on farms or in local businesses, in exchange for money or board and lodge. All making for a rich journey, despite the race element! …  But for the 72, what’s the blessing? Why couldn’t Jesus have planned his time a bit better?  Well we get a clue as the possible response to that question, in our other readings.  Isaiah likens the work of God (doing a new thing in Jerusalem) as the birth of a child. And well, once the clock starts, birth waits for no man, there is many a story of a child being born and Dad or another relative not making it home or to the hospital in time! However long your longed for or planned for a child once things are in motion it’s happening, ready or not! And I wonder whether today, in 21st century mission, whether we have lost our sense of urgency for the spreading of the good news of the kingdom?  Of course if something is urgent, it also forces us to focus our attention, reassess our priorities. God’s new thing, the new life of the kingdom of God, is to be our absolute priority. Anything that gets in the way, old traditions, old rules, worldly concerns (mobile phones and extra baggage?!), are to be laid down.  And to top it all off, we discover too that this mission is to be risky, dangerous even. Jesus tells the 72 that they are to be lambs amongst wolves. Prey amongst predators!! And later in the story we hear how they faced demons(!), which sounds dangerous to me!  But we are reassured that the church, those sent out in the name of Christ, can be confident of his authority and the protection. Jesus reminds the disciples not to get hung up or distracted by their successes or failures. The thing that’s important, the thing that they can rejoice in is that their names are written in heaven. What’s most important is the spread of kingdom of God.  Paul says something similar in Galatians, in v15,arguing that ‘Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.’.  So in a short time of silence now, let us reflect; as members ourselves of a larger group of disciples, as one of the nations of the world, is Christ sending us out ahead of him to prepare the way? Are there opportunities we are being called to, in our community to share the good news?  And if he is, what do we need to prioritise, or indeed set aside, for the sake of the kingdom of God?    **Notes:** |