

Proper 9 (Year C)

4 July 2010

St Mark's, Tampa

✠ **I speak to you in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

They were a privileged people, a *chosen* people. God had moved mightily among them; he had said, "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." There was no greater honor than to be counted among the people of that nation, a land of promise, of which the Lord had said, "I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream."

Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that your nation is blessed by God, and prosperous, and a light to the nations, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Last week we began what many people call "Luke's special section." It began with these words: "When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." It's a journey that Mark manages to get through in one chapter, but Luke gives us ten, reminding us several times along the way that Jesus' face is set toward Jerusalem. In last week's Gospel we began to hear about the cost of that journey, and what it means for people who are going to sign up for it. Don't follow Christ unless you're prepared to go all the way; once you've put your hand to the plow, don't look back.

This week's Gospel is addressed to people who have already signed up. Jesus is sending them out as an advance team, to make people ready for his visit. Here again there is an urgency and single-mindedness about their mission. Jesus tells them not to chit-chat with people they meet. He tells them to find a home base and stick to it – don't be looking around for more elegant food, wealthier companions, a higher thread-count on the sheets at the home where you're staying. You're proclaiming the kingdom of God, not climbing the social ladder. Offer peace – but know that your peace may not be accepted. Be prepared for rejection; be prepared to shake the dust off your feet. But even if you're rejected, be sure to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near *anyway*.

We don't hear about any rejection, though. We hear about success. The seventy report back from their mission, and they are amazed at how well things went: "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us." And Jesus tells them that it was even better than

they realized. They saw the particular healings, the particular victories – but he saw the cosmic significance: “I was watching” – our translation says “I watched,” but that’s not quite right; he’s not talking about something he saw long ago, but about what he was observing while the seventy were away on their mission – “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.” What the seventy experienced was nothing less than the crumbling of the kingdom of Satan and the inbreaking of the kingdom of God.

“Nevertheless,” Jesus says, “do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” With his face set toward Jerusalem and a cross, Jesus is single-minded. What matters is not the success or failure of any particular mission, and we are not to take pride in anything, not to boast about anything, except our place in the kingdom of God, which is no accomplishment of ours, but is a sheer gift of God through the power of that cross to which Jesus is steadily, single-mindedly making his journey. Paul says the same thing in the epistle: “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Liturgically, today is the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost. But, as you may perhaps have heard, on the secular calendar it is the Fourth of July. And on this day, as we celebrate our independence, we may well reflect that we are a privileged people. God has moved mightily among us. As the Collect for Independence Day says, “in [God’s] Name the founders of this country won liberty for themselves and for us, and lit the torch of freedom for nations then unborn.” We may well be inclined to think that there is no greater honor than to be counted among the people of this nation, a land of promise, to whom the Lord has extended prosperity like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that our nation is blessed by God, and prosperous, and a light to the nations, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

So of course, in our single-mindedness, in our following of the Lord Jesus on the way that leads to the cross, in our refusal to boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, we should put away the red, white, and blue, shut down the fireworks display, cancel the picnic. Right? Well, no. Because as we follow “Luke’s special section” over the next four months, we’ll find that Jesus is constantly visiting people in their homes, sharing meals with them – sometimes to teach, but sometimes just to be with them and enjoy them and bless them with his presence. All these things take place on the journey – they all are under the sign of the cross – but even in his single-

mindedness and determination Jesus takes the time to feast and celebrate.

So on this day, let us rejoice with our Jerusalem and be glad for her, all we who love her. But our feasting and celebrating must all take place on the journey; they must be under the sign of the cross, in which alone we make our boast.