



## *The new* SHOFAR

*Ordinary Sunday 13*

**Romans 6:3-11 - Matthew 10:37-42**

### **The Church's Mission is the Mission of Jesus**

Up until this point in the Gospel, we have seen Jesus speaking in broad and general terms about discipleship. Now, however, his attention is focused directly onto the Twelve and through them onto the Church. One of the first things that leaps out of today's saying is the way Jesus links directly the mission and ministry of the Church with his own ongoing mission. The Father had sent him and now he is passing on that calling to those who follow him. It is one and the same mission with the same goal – that the Good News may be proclaimed to the ends of the earth and all people will give glory to God.

That is not meant to be some kind of motherhood statement. It is a divine expectation. How then does the Church – faith communities and individual believers - fulfil that calling? By being imitators of Christ; by reflecting Christ for unbelievers through the way we live in the world, the way we respond to others in word and in deed. If Christ is not being witnessed to by our every action and if the “world” is not being engaged by us, then we are failing as disciples. We are not imitating Christ in the way our baptisms demand of us.

### **Receiving a prophet is the same as receiving Jesus**

Jesus continues to link his own ministry with the ministry of believers but there is a hidden hook in this revelation. When we feel the people of our area (or the nation or the world) are not listening, are turning their backs on what we have to offer, or are running us down and persecuting us, is it because we are the face of Christ to them? It may well be that “the world” around us is rejecting a poor imitation of Christ, a presentation of Christ that is at odds with the Jesus Christ found in the scriptures. Matthew suggests we cannot expect to be received as prophets if we are not speaking as we are called to speak and act. If receiving the Good News is the same as receiving Jesus, then we need to be sure we are first of all witnessing to the saving love and mercy of God in Christ.

### **Christians are called to be prophets of God**

One of the mistakes we make when we are talking about prophets is to think of them in terms of predicting the future. That is not what a biblical prophet does. The prophets interpreted the signs of the times for the people. They revealed to the community what the will of God was calling them to be doing in the present times. This sometimes involved the future consequences but it was primarily directed towards how they needed to be living in the “now” of human history. So, for example, the prophet Jeremiah spoke of the need to repent and to return to faithful covenant living. He warned of the dangers of continuing in their covenant breaking way of life and reminded them that their tenure in the land of Canaan, the land of milk and honey, was conditional on their obedience to the commandments. In preaching this message he used the approaching threat from Babylon as a prop and what a good one it was! What better way of warning them of how darkness and sorrow would overwhelm them and crush them if they did not change their ways, than speaking in terms of a brutal invading army? Their focus needed to be on the way they were living and on what they were failing to do for God. Of course they refused to heed the prophet and his fire warnings were fulfilled. They were thoroughly and brutally battered by the consequences of their own sins.

## **The Christian as prophet reads the signs of the times**

The disciples were called to be prophets as their vocation was to live in such a way that the peoples around them would come to faith in God, would experience Christ living in them. They would see how godless living was the cause of so much pain and suffering in the world and how living the Gospel opened them up to divine blessings of peace, joy, mercy, forgiveness, healing and love. All this is made alive for them in the actions (and sometimes in the refusal to go along with some of the ways of the world) of the Christian prophet. In prayer; through being open to the Holy Spirit stirring them up through the words of scripture and through the grace of the sacraments they celebrate with other believers, Christ's disciples discern the needs of the world in which they live and respond to those needs in love and charity. This is prophesy at its purest.

### **Living within an invigorating faith community**

One of the truly powerful insights offered here is the way every disciple, every Christian man and woman lives and ministers as a part of the whole of the Body of Christ and in the name of the Body of Christ. We are enriched by the missionary activities of others, just as they are enriched by our willingness to take up our own calls to discipleship. We support and encourage them by our faithfulness and our love, just as we are supported by the commitment and witness of their own faith living. Even more than that, in struggling away at our Christian vocations, we are sharing in the ongoing mission and ministry of the Risen and Glorious Jesus Christ. His death, resurrection and ascension did not mean the end of his engagement with the work of the Kingdom here on earth. He continues to minister and all disciples are invited to collaborate with that divine activity already at work before we even think about reaching out to others.

### **But there is not much I can offer to what Christ is doing**

What that means is that the smallest of acts (*even a glass of water in my name*) brings with it the power of Christ. While we might wonder if what we do is of any importance in the light of the great works other people do, Jesus is reminding us the way great things will come from anything, even the simplest and most insignificant action, when it is done in his name. This is true even if we do not notice or understand how that act of love, mercy, generosity and forgiveness impacts on the person with whom we are reacting. The most powerful and fruitful acts are those done in secret, that are seen only by God and the person to whom we are reaching out. Success rests in God's hands. The only thing that is vital to keep in the forefront of our minds is that it is our intimate union with Jesus that brings about the new life, the new creation for which we all yearn and for which our world of today is in urgent need.

### **Paul tells us how to make this real (Romans 6:3-11)**

This kind of living is never easy. Paul understood that and he tells us how *if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him*. The way to live in Christ is to first of all die to our selfishness, to our self-serving prejudices and to all destructive hubris. The more there is of "me" and "mine" in what we do or do not do, the less there will be of Christ.. When Paul says we must consider ourselves as being dead to sin, what he means is that we are now free to choose the kind of life we desire to live. We have been set free from those things that keep us from God and we can only be weighed down by sin if we foster sinful ways within ourselves. We are free and we should live that others will come to seek a share in the same freedom. This in turn brings us back to our earlier discussion from Matthew. This witnessing to Jesus in our every word and deed is the way we become genuine prophets of God. The grace to live in this way is already within our hearts through baptism. Sharing life in Christ means we also have the power of Christ and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to guide us. The next important step is for us to live as intentional disciples of Christ.