

SERMON- Proper 9 (C)
Charles R. Cowherd

Isaiah 66:10-14

Psalms 66:1-8

Galatians 6:~~(1-6)~~7-16

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

July 6th, 2025

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

OPENING:

We have another training lesson from Jesus this morning, another set of instructions for us on how we are to be his disciples.

These difficult instructions do include that curious line:

“Eat(ing) and drink(ing) whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid.”

My son and I were here yesterday, doing one of his favorite past-times, depositing checks in the safe.

He asked, as we headed back to my office, “When we came here to St. Timothy’s, did they pay *you* or did *you* pay them?”

I said: “They paid me... why would you think that I paid them?” And he answered: “Well you just really wanted so bad to come and be the Head Coach here.”

While we were here, Ralph Tildon stopped by and I delivered the news to him, the news that went out in an email yesterday that the Reverend Brad Rundlett, our beloved former Rector, Rector Emeritus, had died in his sleep early yesterday morning. After I told Ralph, I tried to busily fill the silence with more information about the family and what’s next.

Finally, as I allowed a moment of silence, Ralph said simply:

“He has gone to heaven.”

So says Jesus in our Gospel:

“The kingdom of God is drawing near.”

And yet, current events keep coming at us with great speed and difficulty and complexity and importance.

On July 4th, I posted on our Facebook page a message from the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church about all these current events

and our nation’s birthday

and the Church’s mission in these times.

There is indeed a lot on the docket this morning.

As your “head coach,” I endeavor to try to make a sense of it all in my preaching and teaching, but before I make that effort, I will say simply that I am glad, in these moments, to be a part of this congregation, to be with you all during all the seasons that God puts in front of us. As Paul’s letter to the Romans reminds us:

“We rejoice in our hope and in our triumphs; and we rejoice as well in our sufferings.”¹

That fits with our Gospel reading, where we get, again, these difficult training instructions, these topsy-turvy, upside-down, lessons on how to do God’s work in this world.

GOSPEL:

In our passage, Jesus sends out “seventy” (70) across the land to do God’s mission. That number 70 corresponds to the 70 nations listed in Genesis, all said to have descended from Noah’s three sons after the Flood.

That number 70 occurs frequently in the Old Testament to mean something like... ALL of humanity.

70 apostles for 70 nations.

St. Timothy, our patron, made the list for the 70 apostles... so we can imagine ourselves, “St. Timothy’s Church” as also entrusted in that mission.

The United States, though, is not, of course, on that list of 70 nations but we are engaged, as Christians living in America, in God’s mission as well.

We have been trying as the Episcopal Church to follow that mission for 249 years or so.

I don’t have all the answers this morning for how we might do so more effectively. The Right Reverend Sean Rowe, our Presiding Bishop, offered this in his July 4th message: that historically we have been the “Church of Presidents,” that 34 of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence were Episcopalian, that 11 of our Presidents likewise come from our denomination.²

But: “Today, however,” he wrote: “we (the Episcopal Church) are known less for the powerful people in our pews than for our resistance to the rising tide of authoritarianism and Christian nationalism emanating from Washington, D.C.”

Those are his words, strong words, they are issued from “out there.”

But I know that when I visit people in the hospital and they have the news on, it’s here.

When I call people on the phone and they’re listening to it in the background, it’s here.

When people tell me about losing their jobs, it’s here.

¹ Romans 5.2-3

² [Presiding bishop: ‘Once the church of presidents, The Episcopal Church must now be an engine of resistance’ – Episcopal News Service](#)

When our Spanish-speaking members are fearful to come to church, it's here.
And, when I read our Gospel, and it's there too. It's here.
And by "it", I mean political division, social discord, confrontation, rejection and loss.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus, as our actual "Head Coach," was ready for that, he prepared the disciples accordingly, he had the halftime, the pregame, the postgame speeches already written.

Not the one they wanted, mind you, but the one they needed.

He said: "The kingdom of God is drawing near."

What did he mean by that?

Did he mean chronologically, spatially?

I like to think of that sentence, "the kingdom of God drawing near" as this **theological jet lag** we are living in. A "theological jet lag."

On the one hand, God has won, 'stick a fork' in the evil powers because Satan has been defeated. That's in our passage... And we can rest in that victory

On the other hand, at the same time, we blink and rub our eyes and see that Jesus is still on his way, his kingdom is still coming, and so we need to repent, turn around, and gird up our loins, and head out to do his work.

"The kingdom of God is drawing near."

It's already here, but not yet.

I often use that phrase—"theological jet lag"—at funerals to try to help families understand the dissonance between their human grief in the moment of a loved one dying and the joy that is the Resurrection and the eternal promise that is God's love.

In other words, Ralph was right:

"Brad is in heaven now,"

and yet we grieve profoundly and deeply for him and his family.

And, in a different way, we grieve with our country and the problems that we are experiencing.

"The kingdom of God is drawing near."

One scholar asked, as if to prove the point of the inscrutability of the saying: "Is the kingdom 'arriving' or is it 'approaching'... ?³

It's not a question of semantics; think of the difference between "approaching" and

³ Marshall, I. Howard. 1978. *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 422.

“arriving” if you are out at the Metro anxiously waiting for a train.

Think of the difference if you are in this country and are living under intense threat because of the color of your skin, because of whom you love, or because of your ability to afford healthcare.

How long, O Lord, how long, can we wait for the Kingdom of God?

To recall another moment in our history, thinking about that distinction between an “approaching” and “arriving” Kingdom:

Billy Graham was asked, 1963, to comment about Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream speech” and King’s call for racial equality in this country.

Graham said: “Little white children of Alabama will walk hand in hand with little black children only when Christ comes again.”⁴

That’s not good enough, that mocks God’s demand for justice and the exigency of God’s mission that we are engaged in, that we are called to do with startling urgency: no purse, no sandals, no saying goodbye, and all that.

CONCLUSION:

As a student of history and a Christian leader, I would be charitable and say that Billy Graham was like most of us, he suffered from Jet lag.

Jet lag causes confusion. It’s hard to understand what is happening around you when you are experiencing it. Frequently one needs rest and help in order to comprehend change, to get perspective on what’s going on, to know what needs to do next.

We need the same in these moments of loss and pain and grief.

We are called, simultaneously on the one hand, to have tremendous faith, a grounded, bedrock ability to endure sufferings, to have holy patience where we know who is in charge and who wins. We are called to wait for the Messiah to return.

At the same time, we are called to give up everything, to go and lose and to die, for Christ our King. We are poor fishermen, utterly ill-equipped for God’s mission, sent to do God’s mission in places of great grief and tremendous sorrow, places of division and places where we are not used to going. Jesus sends us out like lambs ready to be slaughtered.

That is a weird, strange game plan.

As a religious professional, that’s frustrating.

⁴ Quoted in Rauch, Jonathan. 2025. *Cross Purposes: Christianity’s Broken Bargain with Democracy*. New Haven: Yale. 55.

You want to get Jesus to hire an Offensive Coordinator, maybe revamp his mission department and come up with a better strategy.

But Jesus has the same response if the disciples come back and say things went like gangbusters and we defeated scorpions and snake; his response is simply: “The kingdom of God is drawing near.”

And if the opposite happens and they spit in your face and you are rejected. The score is the same:

So to from our burial liturgy and the *Book of Common Prayer*:

“For if we have life, we are alive in the Lord,

And if we die, we die in the Lord.

So, then, whether we live or do,

we are the Lord’s possession.

Happy from now on

are those who die in the Lord!

So it is, says the Spirit,

for they rest from their labors.”⁵

AMEN

⁵ BCP, 491-492