

Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7)

Psalm 116:1, 10-17

Romans 5:1-8

Matthew 9:35-10:8(9-23)

Did you listen carefully to the Collect for the Day this morning? Do you remember what we asked for in that Collect? We asked God to 'Keep his household, the Church in steadfast faith and love' and that we might 'through God's grace and love proclaim God's truth with boldness and minister God's justice with compassion.' Three things. And all three make us messengers of God.

Now we Episcopalians tend to shy away from the 'E' word ... that would be 'Evangelism.' We tend to associate it with going door-to-door with little pamphlets asking people if they know where they would end up if they died today. We think of Evangelists as high-pressure salesmen. We assume that if we are 'evangelizing' we are being obnoxiously insistent about sharing our belief and our desire for everyone we meet to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. There's a reason why we shy away from Evangelism and there's a reason why collectively ... as a denomination ... we are known as the 'Frozen Chosen.' Many of us tend not to be so demonstrative about our faith or outwardly emotional. We tend to keep our faith as one of the best kept secrets in the world. But we *are* messengers of God and messengers transport the message from one person to another. That's what our scripture lessons this morning have in common. They each have something to do with messengers.

We've probably all heard the story of Abraham and Sarah many times during our faith walk. And it's a wonderful story. It's a story about the power of God ... about the fact that nothing is impossible with God ... and that God keeps God's promises. We know the basic message, but do we know anything about the messengers who came to deliver that message? Abraham seems to know that these three men are not ordinary strangers appearing out of no where. When he sees them on the horizon, he runs from the tent to greet them. He addresses them as, "Lord," which is an odd thing to call three perfect strangers. Not only is Abraham prepared to provide hospitality to them ... as is the custom of those living in the arid countryside ... but he actually begs them to stay for a little while ... he begs them not to pass him by. And then he treats them to a meal fit for a king! Afterwards, they deliver the message ... the promise from God that Sarah will bear Abraham's son in her old age. It is, indeed, a laughing matter ... and Sarah does. The three strangers completed their mission. They delivered the message. One even volunteered to come back at the appointed time to be sure it had happened. We don't hear any

more about these messengers, but we know that they delivered a promise from God. That's what messengers do. They transport the message from one person to another. And they often deliver promises.

In the Epistle lesson this morning, we hear from God's messenger, Paul as he writes to the home churches in Rome. He's telling them about God's ultimate messenger, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to deliver the message of God's love while we were still weak and ungodly. This messenger from God actually died for us while we were still sinners and Paul re-states that message for the Christians in Rome struggling with their faith. Jesus Christ was a messenger of God's love for us ... not after we confessed and were contrite and had figured it out and vowed to live a new life ... but he came to us as God's messenger while we were still in sin! And Paul is Jesus' messenger letting us know that we should never forget the meaning of the message of Jesus.

There are messengers all around. When we hear the gospel lesson this morning, we hear Jesus authorizing and commissioning his messengers to go to the lost sheep of Israel. Do you know their names ... these original messengers from Jesus ... the original disciples? They were real people ... just like us. And they had names ... just like us!

They were:

Simon Peter; Simon's brother, Andrew; James, son of Zebedee; John son of Zebedee; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew the tax collector; James, son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean; and Judas Iscariot. These were the original twelve.

They were sent out to do as Jesus has done: to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God had come near. They were sent out to cure the sick; to raise the dead; to cleanse the lepers, and to cast out demons. These are some powerful messengers! Jesus has detailed instructions for them as they go out into the world on his behalf. Jesus has begun the mission ... to bring the kingdom of God close to people ... to introduce that kingdom to them ... to show people how much God loves them. Jesus is God's messenger to all of us ... not just to 'tell' us about God, but to show us who God is ... to give us a chance to experience God firsthand. And God does that even today through his messengers.

Which brings us ... to us! *We* are God's messengers. Did you know that? And perhaps we are his messengers in ways that we had not even contemplated. Maybe you have been God's messenger to someone else or perhaps you have experienced God's love through some other human messenger that God has sent to you. Have you ever had the experience of going

through a rough time ... feeling all alone ... and then someone (perhaps someone you've just met or someone who is a perfect stranger) says *exactly* the right thing to you at *exactly* the right moment and your spirits tend to rise? You feel like a burden has been lifted from you. That person may or may not be a Christian, but that doesn't keep God from calling on them to be a messenger to you.

When you are the messenger ... when people know that you are a Christian ... and you lift the burden for someone else by saying just the right thing ... or doing just the right thing ... or just being there with them ... physically present ... at a trying moment ... you are bringing the love of God to them and the power of Jesus Christ to them. You *are* the messenger. And you would never identify all of that with the word Evangelism, would you? ... but that's exactly what it is.

As baptized Christians we are *all* messengers from God to others. The difference between us and the kind and responding person who is **not** a Christian is that we often identify our message as a message from God through Jesus Christ. We don't always settle for just being the messenger. Sometimes we identify who sent the message. In those fleeting moments, we give someone else the opportunity to experience the love God has for them through us. There's no greater calling and no greater mission. And no greater gift to us than for God to use us as His messenger to others. To be aware that God has used you for a higher purpose ... for a purpose in service to God and Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit ... is the greatest 'high' anyone could ever have. We need only be open to the possibility. We need only to be able to recognize what is happening and from whom it comes. We need only to make ourselves available to God.

Evangelism isn't scary. Evangelism isn't obnoxious. Evangelism isn't off-putting. Evangelism isn't difficult. Evangelism is when we get to be God's messengers and there is no greater gift in all the world than to be used by God to be a messenger. It's more than awesome. It is filled with awe. We are the lucky ones. We are the blessed ones. All we need to do is ask God to use us in that way ... and He will. God has a habit of keeping promises.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.