



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Amos 7: 7-15
Second Reading Ephesians 1: 1-14
Gospel Mark 6: 7-13

Mary Magdalene is commemorated in the Church calendar this coming Saturday. I have taken the liberty of scheduling a celebration of the Eucharist on that day in order to honor her memory and to affirm her important position in the Gospel story. Mention of her in the bible is not that detailed, but then we don't get to learn many details about the Lord Jesus himself! Mary Magdalene features in many legends from the Christian Middle Ages, and beyond. She is, for example, the center of attention in the recent "Da Vinci Code" fad where she is portrayed as Jesus' wife. But perhaps an equally shocking title was given to her by no less than the Eastern Orthodox Church- hardly a group known for "New Age" trendiness. For her role as harbinger of the news of Christ's Resurrection that first Easter morning, the Orthodox call her "Equal to the Apostles." That's really something, given what the apostle were, and what they have become.

Those of you who follow church news (and I'm pretty sure that's not too many of you), will know that at the Church of England's General Synod last week, the vote was taken to prepare the way for women bishops in that church. Now, Americans, Canadians and New Zealanders might be a little bemused by this- these other provinces of the Anglican Communion have had women in the episcopate for some time. But even the Episcopal Church in the U.S. did something new by electing a

woman, the current bishop of the diocese of Nevada, to becoming the highest-ranking, Presiding Bishop of that denomination. Both of these events are controversial and have stirred up strong sentiment. In both cases, the theological and traditional teaching about leadership in the Christian Church are being addressed. Some take a very biblically literal view that women should not be in positions of authority. Others see this as an example of finally allowing half of humanity its rights by abolishing the so-called "stained glass ceiling" once and for all.

Bishops, in our Anglican tradition, are the primary ministers of the Church. They are the teachers, the central sacramental ministers, and the signs of unity. (That last item is the one that is going to cause trouble both in the UK and the US since there isn't 100% agreement on women in this role as of yet.) What is sometimes said is that the bishops of our church continue the work of the apostles. That's a very, very intimidating job description. It is also one that isn't always very evident, since bishops have most often been relegated to being the CEO's of the little companies we call the dioceses. They aren't often seen in their pastoral role- the part of the leader of the flock symbolized by the shepherds' staff. Even our friendly and folksy Bishop Dixie doesn't visit us here at Holy Trinity often enough to be a familiar figure.

For us to understand the bishop's role requires therefore that we first understand that of the apostles. And for that we turn to our gospel reading for today.

Today's gospel tells us: "[Jesus] began to send them out..." "Sent out"- $\pi\alpha\pi\lambda\epsilon\mu\sigma\iota\sigma\iota\varsigma$ - that is what the word apostle means: one who is *sent*. Today's gospel reading from Mark tells us how those who had been disciples, or students of the Master, were now sent out to do some of the work on their own. It must have been terrifying to face the prospect of leaving the security of that band of 12, even if they did go out in two's, and told that they had authority to exorcise demons! (Nothing I experienced in seminary would have prepared me for that!) The apostles' marching orders are just that: "orders to march" from town to town, sharing the good news of God's presence in Jesus, but also exhibiting the signs of power that would show that they not only meant business, they also had the backing that made the business real.

But just look at these guys! They weren't chosen for their theological education, their natural brilliance or their people skills. What matters, quite simply, is that they are called and chosen to share the Good News of the coming of Jesus.

I am interested in the fact that today's gospel reading goes to great lengths not in telling us what the apostles had, but what they didn't have: no bread, no luggage, no money, no hiking boots, and no fixed abode. "Travel light," they are told, and that means more than just not packing a fancy wardrobe. They must also shed themselves of everything that they already possessed that might stand in the way of Jesus. That would include their pride, their hopes and dreams, their self-delusions- the need to be "successful" in the world's eyes. The response they got from the people they met might be ecstatic... or it might be half-hearted, luke-warm or downright hostile. That wasn't the point. The point was being a vehicle for Jesus, the Person and the Message.

Too often, when we choose the successors of the apostles to continue the work, be they bishops or priests or lay leaders, we look for skills that might make them a success in the business world, or in academic study- not the simple, but powerful presence that Jesus wanted in the persons he chose: persons chosen not for their personal or academic past- for who they had been, but for who they were in the process of becoming.

There was one more requirement that the early Church added to the simple act of being "sent out" that Jesus performed to make his friends apostles, and that was that the person so chosen had to have been a long-term, committed member of the band of the disciples, and had to be a witness of the Resurrection. That already narrowed the field somewhat, as we hear in the book of Acts when Judas' place was taken by Matthias. It's even harder now, 2,000 years later. But to a certain degree the same principle holds. Those in position of authority in the Christian Church need to have experienced Christ's risen presence in their own lives, and are willing and able to share that with their people. That is the message that our apostles are still entrusted with as they are "sent out." It is a job description that fits the eleven

original apostles, and the one added to make an even twelve. It is a description that fit Mary Magdalene, "Equal to the Apostles" in her work and ministry.

But is this still what we expect of our leaders, and do we get leaders who are able to do this? That is a matter of concern and prayer, since it is no longer a given, and doubt surrounds the personal faith of some in very high places in the Church's hierarchy. But there are still those who keep this faith alive and who are "sent out" to be apostles in our own day. And, thank God, they in turn still send out others to proclaim not trendy theories or personal philosophies, but the Person of Jesus Christ-keeping the Faith alive and growing in a world that needs Him now more than ever.

Let us pray:

O God, you led your holy apostles to ordain ministers in every place; Grant that your Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may choose suitable persons for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and may uphold them in their work for the extension of your kingdom; through him who the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ our Lord. (*Collect for the Choice of Fit Persons for the Ministry. BCP, p. 256*)

Amen.