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Proper 10 B

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The cabin boy loved taking the early morning cup of tea to the great captain of the ocean-going vessel. The ritual was always the same. The little boy would struggle up the steep steps to the navigation deck and would offer the cup. The captain would thank him, take an appreciative sip, put his cup down, and taking up his binoculars would survey the ocean. Then taking out a scrap of paper from his pocket he would consider it carefully and then replace it in his pocket. The cabin boy was intrigued. What was there on that piece of paper that was so important?

One day he found out. The ritual followed as normal --- the cup was presented, he was thanked, the ocean was surveyed and then came the moment as the scrap of paper was taken from the great captain's pocket. The captain gazed at it carefully and, at last, the cabin boy, by craning his neck, saw the message. It read: Starboard is right, Port is left!

Having just taken the ABC'S of Boating class I can say that this obvious reminder is a necessary course adjustment all the time on the water, even when one thinks one has mastered the basics. But what about your Christian navigation skills? Jesus gives us some important and basic

instruction today to steer us through those shoals of indifference and through the storms of crisis that will undoubtedly be part of your journey.

Marks Gospel makes clear the principles of being a disciple. Amos today lets us know that the first step is to be willing to do as God calls us to do: “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.” And wherever one finds oneself God is constantly calling us to His way, to His direction. But the Gospel lesson particularly teaches us three things about our mission and about our message.

First, it is urgent work. The verbs suggest that Jesus is urging his team to go out and get on with it. “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers ... Go on your way. ... Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the way.” The instructions are not only urging that no time should be lost but also that the disciples should travel light; or we might put it another way: “Don’t get cluttered up with so many things that you lose speed...that you forget the basics.” The great Christian movements of history have succeeded because those disciples/founders had a sense of urgency about a person’s eternal destiny resting on knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The message needed to be straight forward and lived and preached. Today there are many outside the Church and, no doubt, a few within it who would be amazed that anyone believe that these days. But if you do not believe that

then why are we here this morning? We are called to carry the most important message ever given to the world, into the world. Christianity, if it be true, demands our total commitment. I hope and pray that this sense of calling to a serious and urgent task will continue to mark your ministry in the future. If it does, I can promise you not only great satisfaction in all you do but deep fulfillment in the exercise of your ministry.

But Jesus underlines a second factor: It is a difficult work. The disciples will be like “*lambs in the midst of wolves.*” This is an image which speaks of helplessness. At many points in their lives, God’s servants are vulnerable, at the mercy of the world. In our own strength we can do little. All we can do is to rely on God’s amazing grace and his presence and his promise which will always surprise us.

When I graduated from college I was in the insurance business for a time. I spent a great deal of time learning a canned message, sales pitch, that was a proven track for selling. We are not given a detailed account of the message which the 12 disciples communicated. It was their experience of Jesus life and message that counted. Both works and words were part of their preaching of the kingdom. They spoke of their Lord and of the peace he brings. They were given authority to heal and to forgive. And a few verses beyond the end of today’s Gospel, we read that they came back later with

joyful news of a positive response and no small accomplishment. But it is clear from the passage that this was/is challenging work, difficult work.

So it is today. We live in a world of too little and too much.

Sometimes the deprivation with which people live makes it difficult for us to reach them. Our prayers, at times, seem so futile as we look at the magnitude of the lack of peace in our world and the horrid lives lived by so many.

Sometimes it is just the opposite, the relative plenty of a person's life erects a different kind of barrier --- both poverty and prosperity, busy-ness and emptiness, being marginalized and being highly mobile all at times can have the effect of pushing the Church from the center of living to the outskirts of life. As you ride in parts of our own country old church buildings have been turned into super markets or gyms or businesses. It makes Christian mission today a daunting challenge: so tough a challenge that some lose hope: so difficult that as some lose their vision they become cynical, they go through the motions. And no one can blame them for losing heart because without God's sustaining grace and without the gift of hope you and I might simply conclude it is "just too difficult."

So what is it that sustains you as the light at the end of the tunnel gets closer and you may be a little cynical and find faith and telling others about it and living it just a little too tough?

I come back to a word I used just three weeks ago and I will come back to it over and over again for it is to be the mark of following Jesus Christ in life; Christ's work is joyful. It is the most joy-filled calling, and vocation in life. It is God's way. The disciples returned from their mission with joy. Yes, it was difficult and in more than one place they had to "*shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against [those who would not believe].*" But the signs they saw of God at work brought them joy, and that same joy will come our way too. One of the saints in our Church year spent 14 years in the mission fields of China before he had his first convert. But he knew that his greatest blessing, and your and my greatest blessing, is in our work offered to our Lord. Few things come costless in life and the same holds true in Christian ministry. The seeds you sow through your life and word in the lives of men and women and boys and girls will produce results of all kinds, some you may see but most which you will not see. But your joy is in planting the seeds and letting God tend to them. Live a life of expectancy, that God's promise is secure and He will have a rich harvest.

BUT the thing that will keep you anchored is your own walk with God. Notice what happened when the disciples returned to their Lord. Jesus had sent them on a mission. They returned blessed. So much had happened that even the demons submitted to them. You would have thought that Jesus

as a great teacher would have affirmed them, welcomed the news and greeted it with pleasure!

Not a bit of it! Jesus seems to ignore what they say and takes the opportunity to point out what should be truly celebrated. In YOUR name we conquered, they shouted. Ah! Said Jesus, what really matters is where YOUR name is. If it is in my book of life --- then rejoice indeed!

What Jesus is saying is that we have to keep returning to Jesus, again and again and again and again. Effective service lies not in the doing but in the being; not in proclamation alone but in proclamation and presence; in the constant living in the presence of the One who holds all things in his hands. Indeed, to neglect prayer and your walk with God is tantamount to not knowing that starboard is right and port is left.

So here in this beautiful parish Church, in this house of prayer that has seen many Christians sent to tend to God's vineyard, you are given your marching orders again, those of an urgent message to proclaim the Good News and know that it will be tended by God. It is an urgent message! Treat it as such. It will demand all that you have to give but Oh the joy that will be given you in return. If you are faithful to this commission you will be like that great ocean-faring captain who daily checks that he knows the basics; constantly going back to fundamentals. And when we constantly check our

navigation by reference to Jesus Christ who sends us out into mission we --
and all should – expect His blessing.