

A Just Church: Food, Faith & Fellowship

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Church Action
on Poverty
Sunday

Church Action on Poverty Sunday

Resource: Commentary on Luke 10: 1-9

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It's clear that large parts of peasant society in Jesus' time were permanently only a few days' work away from being hungry; and it's very clear that those, like Jesus and his disciples, who had made themselves for the time being homeless, were also vulnerable.

The seventy (or seventy-two) whom Jesus sends out in today's Gospel are apparently quite defenceless. But there are things that could mitigate that.

- While they travelled around, it appears that they went in pairs, either two men or possibly a married couple, and they were able to support each other on the way.
- Their very vulnerability meant that they were clearly no threat to anyone. They apparently went without money, begging bag or footwear. Yes, defenceless, but no-one was going to be afraid of them or think them worth robbing.
- They were going to rely on the ancient tradition of hospitality to travellers. It was not unusual or unlikely that fellow-peasants would take them in and feed them when they arrived in new places.
- Finally, with the kind of urgency that a farmer has in bringing in the harvest, they brought good things with them: they had confidence and power to bring healing to the sick; they could create a brief 'reign of peace' with many of the new people that they met; and, even better, they could promise that this was part of a new world, in which what God wanted happened – God's kingdom. And they could say that Jesus, the source of this good news, was on his way behind them.

Poor people *are* always vulnerable: they are more likely to be ill; a sudden change in their fortunes can be devastating; the seeds of violence are often within them and around them; they are mostly limited to small worlds. And yet, while fairer financial and economic arrangements encouraged and guaranteed by the state are vital, the gospel reading suggests ways in which all people can have a richer, fuller life:

- Did it look stupid for Jesus' disciples to travel so vulnerably? They were modelling a world in which no-one was afraid of anyone else. Our society is

so segregated by class and money that myths about the dangers of poorer areas become entrenched, way beyond the reality. Why not go with a friend through a 'notorious' area? The 'reputation' will almost certainly suddenly dissolve.

- Whether your church is in a poor or an affluent area, it can be an eye-opening experience to be on the receiving end of the hospitality of those you might think of as 'poor'. Church twinnings across towns or cities can create moments of community in which prejudices are challenged and some new kinds of society are created.
- Jesus was due to arrive in the wake of his pairs of emissaries and God's kingdom was promised. How can that still be done? It can be done in Best Start Centres, debt advice and support, food pantries, play schemes, health centres – anywhere that volunteers can make a difference and bring a greater fullness of life.
- Jesus' ambassadors were promised that they would receive some opposition, but also that they would be receivers as well as givers of good things. If our society needs one thing more than any other it is the continuous re-invention of community, where unlikely people give and receive and find joy and health together.

On St Luke's Day we celebrate the author of both a gospel and (in Acts) a history of that gospel spreading out into the world. Beginning with the Magnificat and Jesus' own 'manifesto' in Nazareth (Luke 4.16-21), Luke continually emphasises Jesus' care for the poor and the call to the rich to give away and share their riches as the vital step for their personal salvation and for the creation of the community God wants.

Which step is your church going to take today – or tomorrow?