

Sermon preached by The Reverend Doctor Eric Kimball Hinds at The Episcopal Church of Saint Matthew, San Mateo, California on 7 July 2019, The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C, Track Two. Lessons: Isaiah 66:10-14; Psalm 66:1-8; Galatians 6: [1-6], 7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20.

Go on your way... Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house' If anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Those are a part of the instructions, a commissioning of sorts, for seventy followers of Jesus, to go out to homes in nearby towns and villages and proclaim that *The Kingdom of God has come near to you.*

There are two things that strike me about this effort to expand the ministry of Jesus as described by the Gospel writer Luke. The first is the instruction to refrain from traveling with any personal belongings. The sparsity of the travel items seems to create a vulnerability—a person stripped down to their most simple self—ready to engage in an earnest and intimate exchange with strangers. The other aspect that strikes me is that the heart of the mission seems to be to seek out others with whom to share the deep peace of God. In Hebrew the word would be *Shalom*. Followers of Jesus are tasked with sharing the deep peace—the *deep Shalom* of God. This is an evangelism—very different from the modern variation of seeking to convince people to accept Christ as their personal savior. The evangelical imperative to implement some sort of conversion from individuals indifferent to the Christian faith. As we have it in this morning's Gospel, the evangelical mission, at its core, seems designed to *identify with* and *acknowledge* the deep bonds of one another's humanity—attempting to make connections that move beyond the superficial.

It might be interesting to reflect upon whether a modern day instruction of visiting houses would include a prohibition against using technology. Modern political campaign workers who travel door to door have an enormous amount of information available about each household that they canvas. *Leave your cell phones, computer printouts, briefcases and pocketbooks at home*—might be a modern translation of the Lucan text. Although, we make a mistake, I think, if we simply say that the use of technology is all bad, that it works against the gospel, or always gets in the way of human intimacy and connections.

I have shared this story with a few of you, an unexpected experience of deep connection, an experience that could also be catalogued as an experience of deep shalom. It took place just over 40 years ago when I was exchange student studying in London. One weekend, I decided to look up an English friend who I had met the year earlier *when he was* an exchange student in the States. I had his address, but no phone number, and decided simply to set out with a friend to visit Chris on his farm in the town of Henley, which is on the River Thames, not far from Oxford. True to form, I encountered my friend Chris working in the fields of his farm, and we spent a great weekend together. I was “drafted” onto Chris's football team (soccer) to play in a “friendly” game against a neighboring town. We lifted a few pints at the local pub, and we had a lovely Sunday dinner together with Chris's parents and his younger brother Nigel. As it happened, on Saturday Night after dinner, the six of us were gathered together around the Television. We watched a British variety show on which one of the featured guests was the popular rock musician Elton John. The host asked Elton about the song that he would be playing

and he explained that it was an instrumental piece that he composed reflecting about death—and as it so happened on the same day that he composed the song—he learned that a 17 year old messenger boy, who worked for his record label, Rocket Records, was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident. As a result of that accident Elton named the piece *A Song for Guy* which was the young man's first name. Gathered around the telly we all listened to Elton John play the piano. When Elton finished playing there was a silence in the living room that seemed like an eternity, but it was probably only about ten seconds—it was Chris's mother who broke the spell that had come over us—and she simply said *That's the most beautiful piece of music that I've ever heard*. And that is one of the amazing things about music. That an instrumental piece, played on the piano, was able to touch deeply a group of people in a living room watching and listening.

There is a movie currently playing about the early career of Elton John titled *Rocketman*, and from the very first scene of the movie, one of the things that hits you are the amazingly lavish and over the top costumes that Elton John performs in—so different from that evening when John simply sat at the piano in normal dress and played. In reviewing the movie *Rocketman*, Peter Travers, writing for *Rolling Stone* magazine, observes that the movie script hints at the notion that—the glitzy and gaudy stage costumes are something that the otherwise sensitive and melancholy John hides behind—a kind of armor that disguises “*the fear that made him feel small and unexceptional inside—even given to thoughts of suicide.*” If Travers' judgment is correct—John would not be the first or the last gifted artist to suffer from such angst. In his instructions to his disciples Jesus tell them not to worry if they are not welcomed and sent away. In saying this is it as if Jesus has access to modern psychological insights—knowing our deep seated need for approval, combined with our very human fear of rejection.

Even though Elton John was an enormous star by the year 1978, I was largely unfamiliar with his music. I was converted though on that Saturday evening—and I was well acquainted with his music when, almost 20 years later, I heard that he was selected as one of the musicians to play at princess Diana's funeral. During that 20 year span it became public knowledge that Elton John was gay, and for me, a person who grew up in a small town, not knowing any openly gay people, this news invited my reflection upon both the gifts and differences that we all have.

Through the years that instrumental piece, *A Song for Guy*, has helped me many times deal with my own grief for loved ones who had died—not the lest of which was my father who died on the same day as Princess Dianna (31 August 1997). One of the great blessings of a community of faith is the both the possibility of gathering people together from different backgrounds; And through time having the opportunity to drop one's defenses—to let go of pretense—with the opportunity to get to know, at least some members of the community at a deeper level, without being consumed by the fear of rejection or obsessed with winning approval.

In being evangelists for the Gospel, Jesus asks his followers to have the **courage** to be their true authentic selves—for each of us are bestowed by God with our own unique set of gifts. Gifts that are meant to be shared with a larger community. This morning's gospel invites us to first find peace within ourselves—and then to go out a share that sense of God's deep shalom with others—that each of us may know that the Kingdom of God has come near.