



## Being Sent

Sermon preached by the Reverend Carol Cole Flanagan on June 15, 2008 at Christ Church, Detroit. RCL Readings: Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7); Psalm 116: 1, 10-17; Romans 5:1-8; and Matthew 9:35-10:8, (9-23).

*These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near."*

Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book *Bread of Angels*, writes:

“In a world that can be hard and scary sometimes, it is tempting to think of the church as a hideout, the place where those of us who know the secret password can gather to celebrate our good fortune. As we repeat our favorite stories and eat the food that has been prepared for us, it is tempting to think of ourselves as consumers of God’s love. . . Then one day the Holy Spirit comes knocking at the door, disturbing our members-only meeting and reminding us that it is time to share. We are not to be consumers after all, but *providers* of God’s love, *authorized agents* sent out to speak and act in Christ’s name.”

Those of you who remember the 1928 Prayer Book may recall that the rubrics most often referred to ordained persons as ministers. In today’s BCP the rubrics say more specifically lay person, bishop, priest or deacon. The reason for that change is that all baptized persons are ministers as we see in today’s gospel.

Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, is often quoted as having said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Today I want to call attention to that small group. One person can make a difference. But when one does, more often than not that person has had some help. Even Jesus. Today’s passage concerns his entourage.

I am not a MAC user, but I am told that MAC users would recognize “entourage” as the name of a Microsoft program that helps to manage and sort e-mail, something like Outlook or Outlook Express. It offers calendar features, task lists and an expanded address book — all features that, one might suppose, you’d ordinarily need an entourage of support and staff people to help you do. This little program is your own personal “entourage.” It gives you life-support so you don’t need a bunch of people with bluetooth chips in their ears, and clipboards and BlackBerrys following you around everywhere.

Entourages have existed throughout time. But the well-known ones have been more than information managers: They’ve been a critical component of successful careers or movements. They have been circles of persons associated for political or social purposes with an acknowledged leader who have wielded influence beyond what we would expect from a handful of people. Some have, in fact, changed the world.

Consider the entourage once known as the Junto Society (pronounced *who-n-toe*). In 1727, Benjamin Franklin invited 12 of his friends to form a club in Philadelphia dedicated to mutual improvement. They met one evening a week to discuss topics of the day. The members recommended books, friends and shopkeepers to each other and fostered self-improvement through discussions in the fields of philosophy, morals, economics and politics. But the results were not limited to the participants, because those men went out and influenced public opinion. The Junto Society gave rise to America’s first library, first public hospital, volunteer fire departments, police departments, paved streets and the University of Pennsylvania. The society eventually became the nucleus of the American Philosophical Society, which is still in existence today.

Or consider the entourage of people who aligned themselves with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and became a major force in the drive for civil rights while inspiring many more to become politically active and examine their own racism. Following his death in 1968, his associates carried on the work. There’s no question that the civil rights movement led by King and continued by others changed the world.

There are others. The Algonquin Round Table, the literary group formed around author Dorothy Parker in the 1920s, the Chicago Seven, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and their cronies who demonstrated against the Vietnam War at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. And then there is Inklings, the literary

discussion group associated with Oxford University that included such luminaries as C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien (toll-keen) and other writers who individually gave us fantasy fiction, some with Christian overtones, and who as a group, helped shape the works of the individual members.

And then there is the entourage of Jesus. In the gospel reading for today Jesus commissions the Twelve as apostles, and sends them forth into the world. But the verses that precede that provide important context. They tell us that Jesus was traveling with his disciples through the villages and cities of Palestine, teaching, preaching and healing the sick, walking an estimated 3,125 miles over the course of his ministry, which is equivalent to walking across America, coast to coast. And for sure, they changed the world. In doing so, Jesus saw the enormous amount of work to be done and recognized the need for helpers. “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.” And so he calls the Twelve to be those laborers.

After Matthew identifies the Twelve by name, he tells us that Jesus *sent them out* with specific instructions to “proclaim the good news ... cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.” They were entrusted with advancing the mission. They are his entourage and he gives them authority to accomplish the work for which he sent them.

Now all of that is well and good, but what is the point you might ask? Here are several.

**1. All of us who follow Jesus have an entourage** — a congregation, a small group, a faith fellowship. Christianity was never intended as a solitary faith, and those who say they can be just as good a Christian without involvement in a church or faith community of some sort are simply wrong. There is an energy and power in the community, the group, the entourage, or association that is not present in any solitary individual Christian.

**2. All of us are disciples.** When we stop being disciples and think that we have nothing more to learn, we become a burden to the community of faith.

**3. Like the first apostles we are sent.** The first apostles were witnesses of the resurrection. They were sent out to preach the gospel, cure the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons. The first witness to the resurrection and the first to be commissioned to “Go and tell,” was Mary Magdalene who is called the Apostle of the Apostles by the Eastern Orthodox. But we are commissioned in baptism and

at the conclusion of each eucharist we are sent into the world to proclaim the good news.

**4. The success of God's mission in the world depends on those to whom it has been entrusted.** According to the Acts of the Apostles, at the time of Jesus' ascension, the entire band of disciples — that is, all of the active followers of Jesus — numbered about 120 (Acts 1:15). That included the Eleven who remained after the betrayal and death of Judas, the women who were the benefactors of this ministry, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susannah who provided for them all out of their own means, and other men and women who had been persuaded by his words or moved by his actions to believe.

In her book *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*, the author Anne Lamott has an essay “Why I make Sam go to church” on why she makes her teenage son, Sam, go to church.

“I make him go because I can ... I outweigh him by nearly 75 pounds. But that is only part of it. The main reason is that I want to give him what I found in the world, which is to say a path and a little light to see by. Most of the people I know who have what I want — which is to say, purpose, heart, balance, gratitude, joy — are people with a deep sense of spirituality. They are people in community, who pray, or practice their faith — people banding together to work on themselves and for human rights. They follow a brighter light than the glimmer of their own candle; they are part of something beautiful.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter and the other 120 rushed out to testify in the streets and some 3,000 people were converted on the spot. But move to the next paragraph and you'll find this verse: “*All who believed were together ... Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:44, 46-47, italics added).

That's the entourage, the association, the congregation. This is the critical mass with the capacity to incorporate those God was calling to be part of this enterprise. It was their energy as a band of believers, their *esprit de corps*, their praise of God, and their glad and generous hearts that attracted people. It began with 120 people; and they changed the world.

Sources:

HomileticsOnline, June 13, 2008

Anne Lamott, "Why I make Sam go to church" in *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (Anchor, 2000), 100.