

Shared Ministry

July 8, 2007

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

Moses was having a hard time. The incessant whining of the people, the blistering sun, the constant sand in the eyes, the roaring of empty bellies, all conspired to remind the wandering Hebrew slaves that they had seen better days back in Egypt. With this rumbling of the rabble to contend with, it's little wonder that Moses hadn't had a nervous breakdown. His only recourse was to fall back on Divine intervention. And that's what happens. The Lord comes to the rescue of Moses. Taking some of the spirit that rested on Moses, the Holy One places it on seventy of the elders of Israel (Num. 11:16-17).

Call it Divine delegation, or, elder election, or, mercy on Moses. Whatever. But these *deputies* step forward to share in the revelation of God, and then, to share the responsibility of *leading* along with Moses. *Shared ministry*, from that moment forward, is the order of the day for the people of God.

Shared Ministry
July 8, 2007
Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

It seems that God led Jesus to follow a similar pattern. As Jesus turns toward Jerusalem, he realizes that he needs help. No longer can it just be himself and/or the Twelve proclaiming the Kingdom's power and glory. Time is short. The harvest is too plentiful. A wider reach is called for.

Today's Gospel passage describes a second wave of evangelists that Jesus sent out to the highways and byways. The first commissioning had been given the Inner Circle, described by Luke at the beginning of Chapter 9: *Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority....to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal* (vv. 1-2).

But then, in an extension included only by Luke (Chapter 10), we read that Jesus expanded the call through a second commissioning. The seventy are never mentioned by name, and there is no hint that they were especially gifted, trained, educated, noble, pious or exceedingly moral as

Shared Ministry
July 8, 2007
Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

examples to the people. There was apparently no indication that they were great preachers or communicators. They are referred to not as the *seventy best*, but simply the *seventy others* (v. 1).

Jesus gave these seventy, as he did the disciples before them, very little to go on. They were simply told to disperse themselves out over the territory, armed with two *tools*: the authority Jesus bequeathed them, and the support of a partner, i.e. traveling in pairs.

There is great wisdom in this minimalist approach. The confidence and sense of being *sent* goes a long way to provide courage and perseverance for facing such a lonely grass-roots campaign. And the presence of another laborer provides the human balance and companionship in service that still works well in our modern models of ministry. God will do the rest; *painting* on human canvasses the necessary gifts. Looking at the size of their task and the immensity of the world, we can marvel that the seventy

Shared Ministry

July 8, 2007

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

succeeded as well as they did. The key to their success, perhaps, is to look more closely at their message: *The inbreaking power of the Kingdom of God is about to be unleashed on the world.* Now that *is* news!

The seventy, a seemingly unequipped, unsophisticated bunch of willing workers, actually have an unusual commonality with later Christian evangelism. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians (2:1-5): *When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on the power of God.*

Shared Ministry
July 8, 2007
Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

We might say “*ditto*” for the seventy. Their effectiveness lies in the fact that they applied the compassionate power of God to those afflicted by evil in the world. *Healing* was essential to their proclamation, and *proclamation* was a consequence of healing. To do one was, in effect to do both. By going among the needy humanity of their day, the seventy embraced a way of life, an emptiness, and an urgency. It is in the places of acute pain in our world today, in international strife, human rights, poverty, racism, sexism, it is in those places that the power of Jesus for healing and renewal is most needed. And often the least realized.

The Seventy brought a *new* and *different* message. They proclaimed a God who is a true partner with humanity, close, not remote, always reliable. They proclaimed a God of healing love, a God who forgives instead of condemning; a God who does not oppress, but raises up; a God who does not wound or curse, but who makes new. They simply shared their experience, strength and hope,

Shared Ministry
July 8, 2007
Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

and invited others to enter the stream of this Holy Reality. The Spirit, not the Seventy, would do the convincing. And the Spirit acted through *them*. Healing happened. Deliverance occurred. Peace took hold. ***Proclaim and heal for Jesus***, because to do either one *right* is, in effect, to do both.

We, like Paul, are also heirs of the Seventy. And we are ***sent out*** after every service in this Church. ***Go in Peace to love and serve the Lord*** does not call us to be magicians or super-apostles. Rather, such faithfulness makes us channels of Gospel love. With openness to others, in wholehearted reliance on God, and with a commitment to be used ***however*** God will use us, the mission of the Seventy goes on, from generation to generation.
AMEN.