

Blogging toward Sunday (Ordinary #14C)

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As I read through one of the epistles, with Paul hammering an early congregation for its members' infidelities and numerous discipleship shortcomings, I wish I had the guts to give my people the sermonic tongue-lashing they so richly deserve. Then suddenly, in mid-diatribes, Paul asserts, "Now you are the body of Christ."

Really? This forlorn conglomeration of inept hangers-on, they are the body of Christ? It's outrageous for Jesus Christ to so limit himself in such a lousy body. Alas, that's the way this God works.

Let's first agree that God can do anything, anywhere, anytime God wants. Self-sufficient omnipotence is the very essence of deity? Right?

Wrong.

There is something about the Trinity that refuses to work alone. One of the medieval rabbis, in his commentary on the Exodus, stood amazed that Yahweh refused to work wonders without Israel. The Creator of the Universe needs help? Whatever God wants to do for the world, God chooses a ragtag family like Israel to do it. Though God does not need Israel or anybody else to work wonders, something in this God desires to work synergistically.

So Jesus begins his ministry by calling the Twelve. Lest some think that he's called a select group, an inner circle, note that Jesus calls a crowd,—no less than Seventy—and sends them out to do the very same work that he has been doing.

If Jesus is really who the voice said he was at his baptism—nothing less than the very Son of God—then if he wants to do something, why doesn't he just do it? Because that's not the way Jesus works. Whatever he wants to do, calling, commissioning, sending is his modus operandi. The Seventy "return with joy" saying, "It works!"

Note that absolutely nothing is said about the qualifications of the Seventy—their gifts and graces, prior experience, gender, sexual orientation, grades in college—the myriad of criteria by which I ordain people in my church today. Apparently prior qualifications are beside the point. There is no qualification, no prior consideration or professional formation other than the call and commission of Jesus. It's almost as if the Seventy don't have any names, histories or talent, as if they are nothing until Jesus sends them out. Yet the Jesus Revolution takes place. Through them Satan is dethroned, the kingdom comes and the good news gets proclaimed.

From Luke, we go to 2 Kings 5: 1-14. A great, influential male named Naaman, a powerful Syrian general, has a great big problem that he can't fix. He is afflicted with a dreaded disease, and presumably "Syrian general" had the same connotation then that it does in Israel today. A little Hebrew servant girl becomes the means of his salvation when she urges him to submit to the prophet's will and wash in the Jordan.

It takes a great God to stoop to work through little people like us. In your church and mine we get to see Satan dethroned, the powerful brought low, the lowly lifted up, miraculous healing and the kingdom brought near as Almighty God works through ordinary folk. Today's texts are being enacted before our very eyes, right in our congregations—if God would just give us the eyes to see the peculiar glory of a Savior who refuses to save alone.