

23 - JESUS SHARES THE POWER

Luke 9:1-6

The next episode of Jesus' ministry as Luke described it shows how much he wished to share the power of God's Spirit that was in and working through him.

To be an apostle meant to be sent on a mission. Their training complete, Jesus empowered them and gave them his authority to go as do as he had been doing all through Galilee. It was a ministry of exorcisms, healing and the proclamation that God's reign of love had already begun.

There is much scholarly debate whether Jesus actually did send out the apostles during his lifetime. John's Gospel tells of no such mission. In a later section of his Gospel, Luke tells of a much larger mission of seventy disciples (10:1-16). Comparing the witness of Matthew and Mark, however, leads to the conclusion that the three writers had similar accounts that each edited in his own way.

I indeed the mission did take place, the scant supplies they were to take with them and directions for wasting no energy or futile anxiety over possible rejection suggest a short, quite successful foray into the mission field. Would that every ministry the church has undertaken over the two millennia of its history could have been as successful.

Sharon Hinge believes that the details of Luke's account have all the signs of later missionary activity of the early church as described in Paul's letters and in Acts.

There were other factors to be considered as well. George Caird wrote of three:

1) Unremitting demands of the crowds for more and more miracles raised expectations not even Jesus could fulfil alone.

2) Growing antagonism of Jewish religious authorities who thought of Jesus as a blasphemer.

3) Suspicions from the Roman political authorities who wanted no disturbances they could not control by force of arms. (*Saint Luke*. Pelican, 1969)

The disciples' brief tour appears to have been carried out in haste and relied exclusively on a receptive, hospitable audience.

Shaking the dust off their feet if they were not well received was a common Jewish practice of the time. For centuries Persians, Greeks, then Romans had been in control of their holy land. This was now Gentile territory. Shaking the dust from their feet represented a symbolic and defiant gesture of rejecting this domination.

Jesus bid the disciples do it for a different reason: They were proclaiming the arrival of God's reign of love. This was a decisive moment and there was no time to waste. Those who would not listen were in danger of being left out of God's kingdom.

Did Jesus himself believe that the end of history was at hand? That God would soon bring about the long promised "Day of the Lord" and of judgment of which many Old Testament prophets had spoken? It would appear that the early church so believed and read this back into Jesus' teaching.