

Here are three “fun facts,” for openers... First, regarding our St. Luke reading, comparative Bible versions are evenly divided on whether *seventy* or *seventy-two* other disciples were ordained by the Lord, along with the Twelve. Both numbers reflect the Old Testament. In Exodus 24, *seventy* elders ascend the mountain with Moses; thus, *seventy* disciples reflect Mosaic leadership. But *seventy-two* is a multiple of twelve, the number of Israel’s tribes; thus, *seventy-two* disciples reflect the universalism of Jesus’ mission.

Secondly, the latter half of the closing verse, “Do not go from house to house,” omitted by the BCP, is found in the NLT, *before* the mandate to “stay in one place” and the claim that “those who work are worth their wages.” Thus, the NLT, though not “word-for-word” focused, lines up “thought-by-thought” with the BCP version, ending with a positive claim about missionaries being worthy of material support by their proselytes, rather than with a negative mandate against “couch surfing,” in keeping with today’s vernacular.

Thirdly, St. Luke, indeed, is the only full-blooded Gentile among all the disciples. In my earlier homily, from the Twelfth Sunday After Trinity, I categorized St. Mark as a “Gentile” disciple, on the grounds that he was a disciple of St. Peter, and that he had written his Gospel for a largely Gentile audience. Those findings, along with the finding that St. Mark’s father was a Gentile, are accurate. However, conversations with Fr. Kurt, following the Service, have helped me to discover that St. Mark’s mother was a Jewess, which, in keeping with Jewish tradition of religious merit being passed, matrilineally, would render St. Mark a Jew, after all — despite Fr. Kurt’s willingness to allow me “partial credit” for my studies (he’s good for that, sometimes).

Worth noting, here, the first “fun fact,” regarding the “seventy-or-seventy-two” other appointed disciples, could present itself as one of those convenient “factoids” for progressive scholars to cite, thereby endeavoring to discredit Sacred Scripture as a wholly reliable source of history.

For a preemptive rebuttal to that deleterious strategy, I'll offer the following points: (1) if I can be mistaken in my own interpretation of the Bible, so can any progressive scholar, since we're all human; (2) the difference between a reported "seventy" and "seventy-two" other disciples, demarking one Biblical manuscript from another, does not nearly prove the Bible to be unreliable, so much as it proves the utter absence of a "conspiracy" among human recorders of Biblical events; and (3) while many news publishers have had to "retract" certain stories, fairly soon after presenting them, none of the disciples of the Lord, since His Ascension, were compelled, at any point, in course of later investigative circumstances, to retract anything.

In light of all these "fun facts" and their implications, we can be confident that all the New Testament witnesses, including that of St. Luke, are reliable, historical sources, as St. Luke himself, a physician and historian, assures one esteemed Theophilus, by way of introducing his own Evangelical Account.

More pertinent for today, however, with an eye toward this year's Twentieth Sunday After Trinity falling on St. Luke's Day, is the realization that, while the seventy-something, other disciples are not given the power of exorcism, along with the famous Twelve, both groups travel lightly and perform their duties with singularity of purpose, namely, the spreading of God's Peace, for the restoration of mankind to God's Favor, all for God's Glory.

*God's Peace, God's Favor, and God's Glory* are the key themes to St. Luke's Gospel. That may seem like a shallow observation, until we realize that much preaching, today, emphasizes God's Favor, in terms of "tolerance," and God's Peace, in terms of "not judging," while leaving out, altogether, the theme of God's Glory, with a preference for a focus on man's glory, instead. Collectively, today's Scripture Readings, including our passage from St. Luke, provide a well needed corrective to that prevalent, homiletic handicap.

Since we had such an enjoyable time with Exodus, last Sunday, let's dive into it, again, today, to unpack our reflection! For an overview, the key themes of Exodus are the following: (1) God delivers His people from oppression, as portrayed in chapters 1-15; (2) God remains present with His people, as portrayed in chapters 16-18; and (3) God establishes a covenant with His people, as portrayed in chapters 19-40.

The Lukan themes of God's Peace, God's Favor, and God's Glory are visibly commensurate with the Exodus themes, in as much as God's Favor is revealed by how He delivers His people, while God's Peace is known through the covenant that He makes with His People, and God's Glory is recognizable in how He remains present with His people, notwithstanding their proclivity toward such mindsets and misdeeds which should have put them right back out of God's Favor and into perdition, the threat of which is evident in our Exodus passage, today.

Very much in contrast to the Twelve Apostles and seventy-something disciples appointed by Jesus, Moses' people were well-laden with earthly riches and very divided in purpose. On the one hand, they had much appreciated Moses' leadership, but, for lack of emailing and texting capabilities, they lost confidence during the 40-day period, when he was seemingly missing in action, while he was up on the mountain receiving God's commandments. So, they gave all their jewelry to Aaron, who melted all of it down, with the mysterious result of a golden calf, triggering the shin-dig reflexes of everyone present.

"And out came this calf," a stammering Aaron explained to the incensed Moses, regarding the idol's design. The Exodus text does one of two things in this narrative: (1) it brings out Aaron's best efforts at camouflaging his own designing contributions; or (2) drawing upon Ancient Near Eastern folklore, it alludes to the presence of some spirit supplying the magical power to form the golden calf.

Given the entire Biblical witness, as well as the adage, “The Devil’s in the details,” both factors could’ve been in play. We can discern this, today, in the case of those preaching false doctrine, constantly; they may be in bondage to the flesh but, perhaps, also to the Devil!

In any case, the people’s reveling response indicates their ready acceptance of a deity who “favors,” or “tolerates,” all people, just as they are, being “peaceful,” or “not judgmental.” But they missed the mark, regarding God’s Glory, and Aaron’s homiletic approach didn’t help, at all. Yet, instead of destroying all who had sinned against Him, God, with a Mosaic cocktail, educated them, regarding His Glory: Indeed, God accepts all people, just as they are; but the terms of peace He offers people, with clear implications of judgment upon sin, are intended to cultivate human covenant members into something more than what we are, naturally, being fallen from glory, corrupted by the flesh, the world, and the Devil, while faced with a choice to believe and repent or perish.

As God called Israel out of Egypt, where many gods were worshiped with slavery par for the course, God calls His people out of enslavement to various idols and worldly agendas, into the light of His Kingdom, wherein God's adopted children, from all corners of the earth, serve Him with singularity of purpose, each utilizing his or her talents for the spreading of God's Peace, to restore mankind to God's Favor, all for God's Glory.

St. Luke, from St. Paul's witness to Timothy, is a shining light among many such servants, being the only one remaining with him, through good and bad times, the latter climaxing with his imprisonment at Rome, where he awaited his martyrdom, which would take place in 66 or 67A.D. Shortly before his martyrdom, he would send his final letter, his Second Epistle to Timothy, wherein we find that, unlike Alexander who rebelled against Paul, or Demas who deserted Paul, Luke remained with him, just as the Twelve and the seventy-something others, in obedience to the Lord,

remained in one household of their missional territory, not roaming from house to house with sundry, self-seeking motives — angling for better food, pursuing romantic interests, accumulating trinkets — but rather, in singularity of purpose, spreading God's Peace, for the restoration of mankind to God's Favor, all for God's Glory. Indeed, St. Luke epitomizes this singularity of purpose, encouraged by Psalm 67: 4-5 — “Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people rightly, and govern all nations upon the earth.”

With all these things in mind, then, let us pray that God, mercifully, will deliver us from all idols and, graciously, correct any wayward clergymen, filling all of our hearts with the Holy Spirit, so that we will drink Christ's Blood with faith unpossessed by those who drank their gold, gaining wisdom to redeem the time, for the spreading of God's Peace, for the restoration of mankind to God's Favor, all for God's Glory; Amen.+