

Worker Bees in God's Garden

Luke 10:1-9 by Patty Friesen (July 24/16)

These glory days of summer I give thanks for bees, as I pick fresh warm raspberries off the canes and pour honey over them. Bees pollinate over 70% of what we eat. Bees are amazing. They are wired for finding flowers. First, they have a good sense of direction, which helps them return to the hive with no problem. Second, they have an acute sense of smell that helps them detect a wide range of flower fragrances. Third, bees remember. They can recognize and recall landmarks around their hive, flower patterns and blooming schedules. Fourth, bees have keen eyes. They can differentiate light from dark, distinguish shapes and recognize differences in colours. They can see ultraviolet colours, which are radiation wavelengths that humans can't see. In fact, some flowers have ultraviolet nectar guides, which are markings that point bees to the nectar.

Flying far from home, upwards of three miles, the worker bee is tempted by a myriad of smells, colours and shapes. Some flowers are ignored, for not every flower is good for the hive. When the bee finds a flower, it returns home rejoicing with a waggle dance to describe where the flowers are and how far away. It's waggle dance mobilizes the entire hive. They go out rolling in the clover, frolicking through the beans in an orgy of apicultural delight. Twelve trips per bee is common, for the nectar is plentiful but the bees are few.

Pollination sometimes only occurs when combined with buzzing. The anthers of some flowers only release their pollen if they are shaken. Bumblebees achieve this by place the upper part of their body the thorax close to the anthers and then vibrating their flight muscles very fast. At the same time, they make a lovely buzzing sound. Buzz

pollination is especially beneficial for tomatoes and other fruit, resulting in a more abundant crop. (www.buzzaboutbees.net)

Today's scripture is about the commissioning of the 70 disciples or worker bees. The New International Version has 72 disciples because they are sent 2 by 2 and 70 doesn't divide by 2! In Luke chapter 9, we have the commissioning of the 12 disciples as we have in Matthew and Mark but only Luke 10 expands the role of the 12 to include all 70 of the disciples. Apparently in Luke's gospel, anyone can be a disciple. The significance of the 70 can be traced to Genesis 10 where the Hebrew text lists the 70 nations of the world. The mission of the church is meant for all the nations of the world. The pattern of sending out the disciples two by two is based on Moses' Law where two witnesses were required for a testimony to be credible. For this reason and probably because of the rigors of travel, the practice of apostles working in pairs is evident in Acts with Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, Barnabus and Mark and Paul and Silas.

So the 70 or 72 are sent out ahead of Jesus. Their work is to prepare the way like John the Baptist prepared the way for him with the urgency of the words, "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." This abundant harvest parallels the parable of the sower that we heard about at the Sunday School picnic, the word of God that fell on fertile soil and produced an abundant harvest of 100%. And everyone knows when the harvest is ready, you've got to go, go, go – pick those beans, raspberries, tomatoes or they fall to the ground and are wasted.

The worker bees are to take nothing with them but rely on the hospitality offered. Implicit in this reliance on hospitality is the removal of all social barriers. In the book of Acts, Peter and Paul will be received in Gentile homes and will eat with Gentiles as part

of the expanding mission of the church to all people. They are to bring peace to the houses in which they stay and to remain there and not look around for better quarters or seek to prolong their stay.

Three instructions are given in how to spread the good news about Jesus. 1 – Eat what is provided, 2 – heal the sick, 3 – announce the kingdom of God has come as evidenced in the first two commands about eating and healing. The three facets of the mission encompass the creation of community through eating together, the care of physical needs through healing, and the preaching about Jesus.

In our context, we don't go out two by two anymore like the Jehovah Witness and Mormons do. In fact when I see two well-dressed young men coming down the street in my neighbourhood, I turn close the curtains and don't answer the door! We're repelled by the third facet of evangelism – preaching without the first two facets of relationship building through eating and healing. As Mennonites, we're most comfortable with the first two facets – eating or feeding. We do that well through cooking and serving at Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Mennonite Central Committee Sale and Friendship Inn. We know how to do food. And the healing part we're pretty good at too – through building relationships with people who are different from us, bringing in refugees and working in local healthcare. It's that third part – announcing the kingdom that may be more challenging. But I like the emphasis on announcing that the kingdom is already here rather than trying to convince people to be a part of it. It's already here whether we want to be a part of it or not. Jesus has come and has shown us the way. The kingdom of God is near and is surviving despite our efforts or lack of them.

The part of Luke 10 that we didn't read today is the instructions for the worker bees around rejection of their work and the woes to the cities who reject the kingdom. What happens when worker bees aren't allowed to pollinate?

In 2010, the United Nations published a report that bee pollination is worth 250 billion dollars to our economy but not a single bee has ever been sent an invoice. And that is part of the problem, because most of what comes to us from nature is free. Because it is not invoiced, because it is not priced, because it is not traded in markets, we tend to ignore its' importance. But recent crashes in bee colonies have been a wake up call to the importance of bees in our food source. Albert Einstein said, "If the bees disappeared off the surface of the globe then we would have only four years of life left. No bees, equals no pollination, no plants, no animals, no humans."

The current bee decline of course, being linked to new fangled soybean, corn and canola seed shells wrapped in neonicotinoid chemical that repel weevil, moth and midge but also unfortunately confuse bees that can't remember their way home and freeze during the night. But more chemical tonnage is used in gardens, golf courses and window cleaning than in crops, so we are all complicit in the bee problem. We strive for the perfect field and the perfect yard and the perfect church and the perfect life. In our push for perfection, there is often collateral damage in our environment and in how we treat other people.

Willard Metzger, president of Mennonite Church Canada at national assembly two weeks ago preached on our Mennonite emphasis on discipleship – how we reformed Christianity by taking Jesus' commission seriously to feed and heal. He also said that our emphasis on our good works and perfection may make us a little short on grace with

ourselves and other people. People who want a perfect church without gay marriage or alcoholics or divorced people have missed the whole point of the good news of the kingdom of God that God's grace is given to us freely because God loves us = not because we have earned it by being perfect Christians. This was a powerful message as Mennonite Church Canada voted to end our discussions on same-sex marriage and allow congregations discernment on the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The good news is that the kingdom of God is not based on our efforts. It is a mystery that survives all our efforts and failures. There is a power of integration out there, greater than our powers of destruction. The resilience of the spiritual and physical kingdom of God makes me want to be a part of it and labour on behalf of it. I want to be resilient like the kingdom of God. It is an enduring, life giving honey that sweetens our living and gives meaning to our dying. The Good News of the Kingdom is that there is so much more grace than we can imagine. The bees go about their work despite our chemicals, raspberries and beans and so much else in our world just grows. We do precious little to make those raspberries produce and yet there they are – a gift of grace every morning for breakfast. The rains fall; the bees pollinate, the sun shines and we harvest the abundance. That's the Kingdom of God for you. Amen.