

Have you ever been around a group of people who work in the same field, but not the field in which you work? Sometimes the jargon and other insider language causes the uninitiated to look slightly befuddled while everyone else laughs and laughs. Having been an accountant, there aren't that many things that are funny. I do remember one story, although I only remember that the punch-line was "form 1040." I remember thinking this was hilarious, but the non-accountants in the group looked at us like we were out of our minds.

A lot of my police friends tend to talk in numbers: 10-4 and the like. It can get annoying if you're not in on the code.

The same is true, at times, in the church. Just think of some of the words we use that have meaning only to those of us in the know. Rector, narthex, office lights, oblations, sexton (imagine the jokes about that one) and there are many more. It can be confusing to newcomers and guests and may be a bit off-putting.

We find this in the liturgies of the church. In the Nicene Creed, we say that we believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church. We can figure out the "one" and even the "holy" but what do we mean by Catholic and apostolic. Didn't we break away from the Roman Catholic Church in 1549? So why do we call ourselves "catholic". Well, in this case, we are just using the word differently. Catholic means universal. That's why you'll never here me refer to the catholic church. I'll say Roman Catholic. We believe that we are part of the universal church of which the church of Rome is a part. The Roman Catholic leadership wouldn't define that the same way we do.

The other is Apostolic. We can guess it has something to do with Apostles, but what is a different matter. In the baptismal covenant we vow to continue in the Apostles teaching and fellowship. What does that mean?

In the Anglican tradition, we see our bishops as the heirs of the Apostles. It is said that if you trace the bishops who consecrate a new bishop back through who consecrated them, you would eventually get back to one of the Apostles named in scripture. There are even pedigree charts published. That is what we mean when we say that a bishop and church are in the apostolic succession. Bishop Dabney Smith is a bishop in the same line as Peter and James and John. Pretty heady stuff.

That still doesn't really tell us what being an apostle is all about. As I prepared for this sermon, I saw something new, to me at least. In the Gospel read today, it says that Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over different things. It then names the twelve apostles.

That is the only occurrence of the word apostle in Matthew's account of the Gospel. Luke uses it more, but the first time is at this same point in Jesus' ministry. These men were disciples of Jesus, following him and learning from him. Then Jesus conferred special power and authority, allowing them to cure the sick, and cast out demons and sent them out to tell the world that the kingdom of God had come very near.

These twelve were made apostles when Jesus sent them out. Apostle is the English pronunciation of the Greek which means "one sent." These disciples especially close to Jesus were sent out, apostles, to tell the world that the kingdom of God was a present reality.

Biblically, having the title Apostle was an important distinction. The original 12, including that betrayer Judas were called apostles. Paul claimed to be an apostle and in fact argued that as a central part of his letter to the Galatians. When Paul went back to talk to the apostles in Jerusalem, he mentions James, the brother of the Lord as an apostle. This is note worthy because James isn't listed in any of the lists of original apostles. So the title somehow got bestowed.

Apostles – ones sent to say that the kingdom of God is very near. Isn't that an integral part of what it means to be a follower of Christ? To baptize and teach all nations that they might be reconciled to God in Christ Jesus? Isn't there an element of apostleship in the very foundation of the Christian faith?

We are not all called to the office of bishop, the heirs of the Apostles, the twelve. However, we are all sent by God in our baptism to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ. We are all called to an apostolic ministry which is anything that takes the Word of God out and away from our selves.

Today, we say good-bye to 4 of our own. Pastor Jackie and her husband Bill are leaving us for a time to minister in the foothills of the Smoky mountains. They'll be back in November. We are also sending C

Deacon Cynthia and Gene Montooth off to minister in Atlanta, Georgia. We are going to miss them very much. Both of them have truly lived into their apostolicity. They have accepted the call, over and over to spread the Good News of the Kingdom of God in many different ways. The kingdom is more visible here now, because of them.

And so it is with all of us. We, each of us, has an apostolic ministry. It may be hidden at the moment. It may have changed over the years. But if the job of an apostle is to spread the Good News, then we are called to be apostles.

I was at a clergy day last week where we heard a couple of wonderfully articulate bishops talk about ministry. Bishop Don Johnson from the Memphis area had us do a little exercise. He made the observation that most clergy have one sermon they preach over and over using, hopefully, different words and observations. We had to think of the bible verse or story that best informs our ministry. I chose the story of the Prodigal Son and Romans 8 where Paul says that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

He then asked us to come up with 2 or 3 words that could be the title of our one sermon. I chose Radical Grace. If I only had one chance to witness to you, I would say that God's grace is so large and open that there is nothing that would keep him from loving us. Nothing. That is my apostolic mission, to proclaim to all that will hear that God's love knows no bounds and that he desperately wants to be in relationship with you, no matter who you are.

I think that's a neat exercise. I'll probably try it on an adult forum some time. It is very telling.

Jesus tells us that to be a disciple we must pick up our cross and follow him. We must serve him with all that have and all that we are. That's a hard enough task. And, these tasks are personal. They are about how we relate to Jesus in our own lives.

The apostolate is much more communal. We are to take that faith we have developed for our own lives and take it out to the world. Jesus gave the 12 the authority to cure the sick and cast

out demons. Perhaps that's not the gifts we've been given, but we can do what Jesus commended the 12 to do – to proclaim the Good News, “the Kingdom of God has come near.”

We may not understand the exact meaning of those words. But we do know that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of life and light. Of peace and justice. Of hope and promise. Good news indeed to all who hear it.