

Sunday 14th June 2020

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A very warm welcome to our worship for this 2nd Sunday after Pentecost and the 14th in lockdown. Although there has been some relaxing in the rules it is still very difficult for most of us to feel close to others and so I pray that this short act of worship will not only help us to praise God but also to feel a sense of connection to each other.

Let us pray....

We unite with the whole world in praising you, creator God.
We come before you with gladness and thanksgiving.
We praise your goodness;
we praise your faithfulness;
we praise your tenderness.
We are yours and we worship you.
We bless your name for ever **Amen**

Hymn All people that on earth do dwell. (Psalm 100)

Reading **Matthew 9:35 – 10:8**

Reflection: “Learning on the Job” by Don Dowling.

'Pray!' said Jesus to us as the crowds swarmed around eager to hear from him, desperate for his healing touch, crying out for release. 'Pray for God to send more help. There's a rich harvest here. What we sorely lack are workers.' So, we prayed.

What we didn't expect was to become the answer to our prayers. Well, I mean, it's one thing to be the help: to steward the meetings, exercise crowd control, protect Jesus from enemies and well-wishers (as if he'd let us); or to buy and cook the food, look for the next day's accommodation – well, to be honest, the women mostly did all that. As I say, assisting is one thing. It's quite another to do the stuff, to preach, teach, heal and cast out demons. We were learners. Our job was to watch, listen and ask questions when we didn't understand – and that was often enough. Now it appeared he wanted us to do what he was doing! But we were hopelessly unqualified! We weren't trained.

What was worse, he said that he wasn't coming with us. He was asking the impossible. After all, read the standard manuals. What do they say?



"A trained healer must have a thorough grasp of scripture.' We were still learning, or rather unlearning what we had been taught by others. 'Healing needs a thorough grounding in the theory and practice of prayer.' We had to ask Jesus to teach us how to pray, and we still had a huge amount to learn. 'Spiritual discernment is a crucial gift in this ministry.' Yes, we'd seen

this operate in Jesus, but mostly we hadn't a clue as to how he read people. How, for instance, had he'd seen that the paralysed man, who was lowered by his friends in a shower of plaster to Jesus' feet, first needed to be forgiven?"

And as for exorcism – didn't all the manuals say that this should be left to only very experienced practitioners?

Peter tried to put our point of view to Jesus. The master simply smiled and said, 'There always has to be a first time. I have prayed for you. It will be as if I were with you. I have given you a new name. Apostles – sent ones.' 'Oh fine,' I thought, 'as if a new title will solve all our problems. A trainee is still a trainee, even if you call him a deputy manager!' We hadn't really begun to rehearse all our objections – inexperience, where to go, what to say, how to deal with the difficult cases, and what if nothing happens? After all, the manuals tell us to avoid raising unrealistic expectations.

'I can see you are frightened,' observed Jesus. 'But just follow my instructions, and you will be surprised at the results. Now you are to go in pairs,' he said. I'd hoped we'd all go together, but still I was relieved that this wasn't going to be a solo mission. 'Don't visit Gentiles,' he continued. 'As if we would!' I thought. 'Avoid Samaritan villages!' You can bet your life we will; burning them down is my preferred option, but I knew better than to voice that thought to Jesus!

Jesus looked at me and shook his head. 'My mission is first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That is why I came.' I knew that he was talking about priorities, not necessarily preferences, I'd heard the others talk about a centurion's servant – that was before I joined the twelve. 'The rest is simple,'

he said. 'Proclaim that the kingdom is coming. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers; drive out demons.'

I stared at him in stupefaction. I thought I might have a shot at curing a toothache, but raise the dead? Cleanse lepers? Drive out demons? I wondered whether now was the time to plead the Moses' option: 'Lord, please, please send someone else!'

But Jesus had seen through that one too. 'Remember you are apostles,' he repeated. 'Apostles are a bit like ambassadors,' I thought. They carry the authority of the one who sent them. So, he wasn't expecting us to do it! Rather if we stuck to his instructions then he would be there!

'One final thing,' said Jesus. 'It's urgent, so no money, not even coppers, no lunch packs, no spare clothes, no sandals, no stick for support or defence. You will be provided for.'

I didn't begin to argue. After what we had initially been told to do this was child's play. If people would listen to our message, if the sick were healed and so on, then we would be provided for. All I thought was: 'I only hope he knows what he's doing trusting us – we're hardly the A team.'

'I am praying for you,' said Jesus, 'so go!'

And we went.

Reading Romans 5:1-8

Reflection

In these times when it's difficult for us to get out and do things how difficult is it for us to hear this story of Jesus sending the disciples out to do his work amongst the "lost sheep" – they were to "go out and preach!" I'm sure they all felt inadequate and ill prepared for this job, a new job with no formal qualifications.

We all find it a challenge to do new things or to do old things in a new way, we often look back at the way things were and think they were better in the past, those rose-tinted spectacles colour our memories. We are often fearful of change, but this current situation has forced to do things differently.

Many of us are now shopping online when we didn't before. Many of us have learned how use Zoom to stay in touch with people. I've learned how to produce videos not only for these services but also to produce lessons for my students in school. I've even bought and learned how to use a writing

tablet so that I can model solutions to complex algebra problems for my 'A' level students.

This has been a new adventure for many of us and I certainly have enjoyed developing new skills which I wouldn't perhaps have bothered with if the need hadn't arisen.

The Romans reading reminds us that "he has brought us by faith into experience of God's grace in which we now live...this hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit"

We have been challenged in recent weeks, just like the disciples were challenged by Jesus, he showed them that he had a belief that they could do what he was asking of them and that he would provide for them. As the lockdown eases it would be easy for us to want to "get back to normal", but now is the time for us to reflect on what we HAVE achieved in these strange times. What has worked? What should we continue to do? What of what we used to do doesn't need to be done anymore? Never has "we've always done it this way" seemed so meaningless and so let us pray that with God's help and his unconditional love and with our faith we can move forward from these difficult times to be stronger in our mission to proclaim that "God is Love!"

Amen

Let us pray....

Loving God we thank you for all your love for us, we know that it's not because we are deserving that you love us but because of your grace. We have heard again today of your unfailing love and we know that with your help we can do all that you call us to. Often we doubt you and doubt ourselves and for this we are sorry. We pray now that you will strengthen us and give us the resolve to continue to do what you would have us do in your name so that all may feel a sense of your presence in their lives.

We pray for those who do not know of your love, particularly in these most difficult of times, may they feel a sense of your presence in their lives.

We continue to pray for all of those who are suffering loss and illness because of the covid-19 situation in all places in the world. We continue to give thanks for those who are prepared to do what is required to help, support and heal may all feel a sense of your presence in their lives.

There is much unrest in the world as people feel a sense of injustice and unfairness in the way they and others are treated may we seek to remember

that we are all made in your image and may we all work so that all feel a sense of your presence in their lives.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ who sends us out into the world to proclaim his good news. **Amen**

Our Father.....

Hymn Love divine all loves excelling

Blessing

Holy Trinity, one God,
empower us by your presence,
and fill us with your love.

Take us and form us
as people of good news
to praise, love and serve you
that the world may believe.

Glory to you, now and for ever!

Amen

Thanks to Sue Beeby for the readings