

A Reflection from Archdeacon Barry Dugmore for Sunday July 4th 2021 – Trinity 5

Luke 10. 1-20 Jesus sends out the seventy two

If not us then who, if not now, then when?

A few days ago I attended an on-line conference, hosted by the +Ric Thorpe's Gregory centre for church growth and multiplication. I was almost overwhelmed by the range of seminars and talk-groups I could dip into on a whole range of topics related to how each one of us can play our part in the re-evangelisation of our nation, our renewed co-mission from Jesus and the resourcing of initiating and growing new worshipping communities / church planting.

During the day a new vision, Myriad, was launched which aims to resource 10 000 new congregations across England over the next ten years. The Church of England has always been in a planting church in order to reach each new generation, we forgot how to do it for a while, we actively discouraged it for a while, but now we are seeing again that church planting in a whole mixed ecology of fresh expressions, sacramental tradition, and informal contemporary traditions.

- The reading from Luke 10 describes the first mission trip of the disciples – serving, blessing, healing alongside a sharing and offering to talk about Jesus – telling of the Kingdom of God. God is stepping in, taking the initiative, God is doing a new thing.
- Jesus says find the people of peace – stay where you find a welcome – live, show, tell the things of the Kingdom
- Whilst the past 16 months has been difficult in so many ways; churches up and down the land are finding a rising curiosity and openness to explore faith, to discover God.
- The Holy Spirit is re-awakening the church, re-shaping us, re-forming us and opening our eyes to the 'harvest field' – a nation that is looking for signs of hope. This is a Kairos moment, a God moment.

So who is Jesus leading you to? Who are your people of peace? How are you serving them? It will be in a whole range of different ways – because we all have our unique shape and call – our vocation. Brilliant! I wonder though, are you also telling them about the person of Jesus and what it means for you to be a follower? For those who need physical 'bread' we say yes that is our call, but shall we not offer the living bread too?

The marks of mission include responding to human need by loving service, transforming unjust structures, care for the creation, but also to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom which means helping people in a post Christian culture to know about Jesus and why he is the One we base our whole lives upon. Recently Bishop Jill Duff – commented that there are more children in care in her diocese than there are children in their churches. With her challenge to our mission as a national church – she asks – If not us then who? If not now, then when?

Today's Gospel reading describes Jesus commissioning and sending out 72 to share in the work of telling people the good news of the Kingdom of God. The work will be challenging at times, (like lambs among wolves), as there will be those who will not welcome their message or presence.

The appointment of 72 disciples prefigures or anticipates, the great commission in Matthew 28, and the universal mission in Acts. There is to be a sharing in this work, the message is re-enforced with the great commission and the out pouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Jesus makes reference to the scale of the task. –The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field

We may want to pray for others, and we should, but we are also part of the answer to this prayer – God has a big mission team – we just need to be encouraged to grow in our confidence that our God story, our faith story is worth sharing, and to be mobilised as church in a new way to be witnesses to our faith. And to be invitational. Gareth Fitzpatrick is our evangelism enabler in the Diocesan Mission and Discipleship Team, and is happy to work with your church on growing as culture of witness and evangelism. He is also coordinating a pilot project with CPAS called Leading in Evangelism. Our mission hub churches will also be seeking to resource, call out and encourage both our evangelists, but also each person to simply be a witness to the good news of Jesus Christ – Why should Jesus remain the church's best kept secret?

There is a big job to be done. God is a God of mission and mission means being sent out. *Go in peace to love and serve the Lord* – at the end of a service – is a reminder that our employment awaits us outside the walls of the church! Some of us have occupations, some work at home, some of us are retired – but we can all still be employed in mission.

The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.

We often think that we need to be somebody special to share in the mission of the church but God equips those he calls. God has something that he wants each one of us to do for Him. We might be tempted to think there is a classic template or profile for an ideal person to share the story of faith with others, to share something with others about who Jesus is, and what he means to them.

We might have a particular view of what an evangelist is or isn't – some people have a particular gifting and call as an evangelist. We all fit the bill! Your story of faith is unique because you are unique – and we need to hear it? When was the last time you shared it? Is God refreshing his life in you?

Willand Faith Pictures – a group sharing their faith stories – (FAITH PICTURES CHURCH ARMY) were in tears as they listened to the story of faith of an older man in their group – I asked why hadn't you shared it – I didn't think people would be interested – when was the last time you shared it – I can't remember how long ago! – Well you've seen the impact of your story.

What is God looking for in us? Jesus sends out and then the disciples return and unpack with him what they've been doing and seeing – they seem willing, they respond, they go even though they had not been at theological college for a number of years or were the most educated amongst the society they lived in – they are available and they are willing, or we might say obedient to the call from Jesus

- **Call often comes before competency** – The disciples spent time with Jesus before going off doing things for Jesus
- Jesus is content to send them out and do things and for them to come back and talk about how it went.

A Heart that responds to the mission heart of God at work in us

-
- Is the Lord looking for an impressive CV before we can do things for Him?
- We often see high profile Christians and we think Oh who am I? Little me!
 - A heart that desires to serve (Samuel / David etc)
 - Willingness to serve / go out into the 'harvest field' in our patch – Availability!
- **Partnership** – they were sent out in twos – we cannot do this work on our own – so learning together, going together, sharing together is the apprenticeship model that Jesus used.

Partnership looks like rain drops on a lake – The ripples go out from the point of entry. – our mission is about letting people see the ripples – and telling them about the source – The Lord – that is the joy the psalmist speaks of – *Shout with joy all the earth – sing the glory of his name – come and see what God has done.* Jesus says when the disciples return – do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. We recognise that mission and evangelism is the Lord's ministry and not ours (even the demons submitted to us in your name) – we are invited to play our part as agents for the Kingdom, it is the Holy Spirit who will do the work of bringing those we share with into a living faith

Conclusion

God's heart for mission remains, His Spirit is active in the world, and showing us the stirrings of renewal or even revival. So where is the Lord at work in and through my relationships with others? Who are my people of peace? How does the Lord want me to go for him?

TKC – Pray for five – and pray for opportunity – pray for courage – and be ourselves

Be available, be prepared to learn, be prepared to work with others in gospel partnership – and let's look forward to those ripples of God's love and good news spreading out across our communities in the heart of England.

If not you then who, if not now, then when? ***The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few – Ask the Lord of the harvest to send us out as co-workers in his harvest field. Amen.***