

Sunday 3 July 2022
Holy Trinity – Holy Communion (8.00am)
Trinity 3

Isaiah 66: 10-14
Galatians 6:1-16
Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

Go and tell

So here we are in the middle of a series of readings from chapters 8, 9 and 10 of Luke's version of the Gospel. And the overriding theme of these chapters is Jesus' unusual mission strategy.

In chapter 8 we find Jesus himself going through towns and villages, curing people, and gathering huge crowds to hear his stories and see his miracles.

Then in chapter 9, it is the turn of the twelve, who are given instructions very similar to those in today's reading, but without that sense of impending crisis.

Now it is the turn of the larger group of disciples to try their hand.

But, something I find interesting in all these accounts is how little attention is actually paid to the results of these enterprises. We hear hardly anything about the numbers of converts made, the preaching techniques used, the misunderstandings and any abuse they might have encountered. Not really the way to run a new business venture you wouldn't think.

In the passage we heard this morning, when the disciples get back, tired and exhilarated, bursting with stories about what they had done, Jesus doesn't want to know any of that. His words to them seem oddly grim... "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." So, no pat on the back there then.

There's a sense of great urgency in Jesus' commission to this large group of disciples. He sends them off with a picture to ponder as they hurry through the countryside. Jesus tells them that it is as though, all around them, the fields are full to bursting with food, waiting to be harvested, all perfectly ripe. Another day or two and it will all rot, or be eaten by birds and animals. His listeners would be well aware of the frenzy of activity that should be going on but, instead, Jesus points to fields that are eerily empty, almost as though some great sleeping sickness has spread across the land, and no one is awake to know what's going on around them.

All of this is why this mission is so desperately important. There's no time for ordinary precautions or courtesies. They're not even allowed to stop long enough to say "Good morning", when they pass people on the road. They don't have time to try and win people over. Where they get a positive result straight

away, then they can stay and preach the Gospel; where the initial response is negative, they must move on at once. There's no time to plant, only to gather in.

So, why is it then that, when the disciples get back to Jesus, full of stories of all the things they have done in his name, he suddenly changes the focus? They are on a high, feeling themselves at the forefront of this new, successful movement. They have done works of extraordinary power, they are part of the new in-group, the future looks really rosy. But there's only one future that Jesus is interested in - the coming Kingdom of God.

So, Jesus' image of the harvest is absolutely key to all of this. This mission is about life. Without the harvest, the people will starve and die. Without the coming kingdom, their lives will be equally worthless.

We find this note of urgency throughout the Gospels. Now is the time of decision. Now, as we meet Jesus and hear the Gospel, we choose life or death. The harvest won't wait and neither will the kingdom.

So, what can we as God's church here in Penn learn from all this?

The first truth we hear from Jesus is the great need for more workers, Christians willing to sacrifice the comforts of home to go out into the world and tell others about Jesus. That's why, he urges these disciples to pray for more people willing to participate. One of the problems many churches have to face is this unwillingness to go and tell. Somehow, they expect unbelievers to come, sit, and listen. But Jesus puts the proverbial boot on the other foot. It's the responsibility of Christians to take the message to the lost; not to pray that the lost will somehow find the front door of a church on their own.

Secondly, Jesus makes sure the disciples know what to expect. They're not off on some leisurely holiday through Samaria. Rather, Jesus reminds them of the hostility waiting along the way. The most important thing in doing anything for God is the realisation that actually you can't do anything for God. God will accomplish what he wants through you; never the other way around. This is summed up by the mantra which goes..."The church of God doesn't have a mission - it's the God of mission that has a church". To underline this fact, the disciples are told not to take anything with them: no money, not even an extra pair of shoes! Why? God will provide for all their needs, food and lodging included. It's one thing to say it. But to leave home without your wallet or suitcase really does demonstrate total dependence on God.

The third truth we should all embrace seems obvious: some will accept the message and some will reject it. No middle ground exists in the response to Jesus. Either one accepts him wholeheartedly or one rejects him altogether. What can often surprise us is the direct link between the message and the messenger. When the lost reject Christ, they reject Christians (and vice versa).

In other words, as believers share the message of hope, they represent Christ himself. Jesus says, "When you speak, they hear my words."

This truth takes away all the pressure from us. If someone accepts Christ, praise God! If they refuse to listen, it is actually God they refuse to hear.

In summary then, not only does Jesus call us all to follow him, he also sends us out ahead of him to herald his existence and harvest the fruit of his kingdom. It's a task that calls for dedication, a dedication that reflects all that we have ourselves already received. It calls for the ability to travel lightly through life, holding onto only what really matters and letting go of the rest.

The question for each one of us today is this... what do we need to let go of for all that to happen more effectively?

Amen.