

Lyn Valley Mission Community

First Sunday after Trinity

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Exodus 19:2-8a

Psalm 100

Romans 5:1-8

Matthew 9:35-10:23

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

The readings during this long Trinity season help us to reflect on who we are as those called by Jesus and what it means to be the community of the church. Today we travel back from the great commission we heard Jesus give his disciples as he ascended, to the first mission he sent them on. As I read it, I was deeply struck by how much it speaks into our current situation and can perhaps guide us as we seek to be faithful disciples of Jesus today.

I don't know about you, but over the last couple of weeks I have noticed a change in the atmosphere around us. In conversations with people I have noticed more awareness of anxiety, a sense of confusion about what we should actually be doing and a tiredness arising from a long time away from the company we cherish. In our news questions about whether the response to Covid 19 has been appropriate are beginning to surface and the realisation of the long term economic impact is dawning. Alongside this our society is being asked to look and find itself wanting when it looks with honesty at ingrained patterns of racialized injustice both in the past and present. Whereas at the beginning of lock down the main focus was on "all being in this together" and the stories we were hearing were of neighbourliness, self-giving service and love, now we are having to face the ways on which some are suffering more than others, we differ in how we should continue to respond, and the way as members of a society we fail in love.

“Harassed and helpless” – was the description of what Jesus saw when he looked at the crowds around him, and it might describe a lot of the feelings around us now.

It is worth pausing for a moment to recognise that Jesus’ ministry was exercised in a turbulent time too – in a place of radical inequalities among communities under imperial colonial rule where there was no health service to be overwhelmed or modern medical knowledge to be baffled.

And into this time and place, Jesus proclaimed that “the kingdom of heaven has drawn near” and his compassionate response to the harassed and helpless crowd was to send out to them his motley crew of disciples. His disciples, those who had stepped out of the crowd of helpless and harassed people to become his companions and to learn from him the trust in God and the compassion for the world which are the conditions of the Kingdom, were out to proclaim the same message: “the kingdom of heaven has drawn near” with a ministry of healing that demonstrated it.

Currently, I am very grateful to members of our PCCs who are grappling with the huge risk assessment that we need to consider in making a decision as to whether we can open any of our churches for private prayer. None will be ready for opening on June 15th, and it is likely that a number of PCCs will decide that we cannot yet fulfill what is required to open safely. We will keep everyone informed of these decisions. In the light of all the attention I have given this preparation in the last week, I noticed very clearly what Jesus did not say to those beginning to share in his work with him.

He did not say “go and put up a building and get everyone to come to it”. That might be a later development, and a good development that enabled the deepening of worship and fellowship, but it wasn’t where Jesus started.

Jesus' pattern for meeting the needs of a harassed and helpless world, was the pattern of love he shares with the Father and the Spirit, the Trinitarian love we thought about last week: it was ecstatic – a going out with that love to those who need to hear about it.

To start with the disciples were called to go to the villages and towns of their own countrymen, those it was easiest to connect with.

They had no resource except their own person – no money, no bag, no supplies. Their entire mission was based on personal contact – staying in a home where they were welcome, and talking to those who were open to hearing the message of the kingdom (not, interestingly spending time arguing with those who weren't). It was a mission shaped by what they had experienced of God's love in the company of Jesus, and offered not in their own power but as instruments of God's love and power in action.

The passage of our gospel goes on to reflect the later experience of the early church where preaching the gospel brought conflict and persecution, but there is an important principle in the midst of Jesus' guidance:

Do not worry about how you are to speak and what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at the time: for it is not you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Here we find Trinitarian love at work again: when a disciple seeks to communicate about God, it is God's love, through the power of the Spirit that will be spoken.

Do not worry: it is not you who speak but the Spirit of the Father speaking through you.

I wonder, if there is an invitation to us as Jesus' disciples today, his body, the church, stripped of the usual resources the church has gathered over the centuries, to learn again from his first instructions to those who would draw others towards God's love, offer the healing that their people then needed and proclaim the

closeness of the kingdom of love and trust where the harassed are soothed and the helpless empowered.

How will we, you and I, take God's healing into our harassed world, and show those who feel helpless that the kingdom of heaven is near?

If that sounds like a big ask, it is, but we don't do it in our own strength, and we each do it in our own small way, as just one member of the body of Christ which through the Spirit is coordinated to do the Father's will.

We start from our own companionship with Jesus in prayer. The first disciples learnt through living with him: we can imagine them praying and worshiping the Father with him, talking around the fire or over meals, watching the way he accepted the hospitality of those who housed them on the road. It all starts with learning to be like him. No doubt, it was in his company that they began to let go of their own sense of helplessness, the harassed minds soothed by the presence of one with deep trust in God.

It may be that your discipleship at the moment is staying close to Jesus, allowing him to soothe your anxiety and help you trust in God's presence in all that we are living through.

Then he sent them to proclaim the good news of the kingdom: what is the good news of God presence that you want to share with others? It may be being able to talk when the time is right about how your faith is helping you now; it may be a particular quality of God's presence in your life that you can share or act on; it may be signs of God's presence in the world that you can gently point out to others.

And he sent them on a ministry of healing: what can you help heal now? Perhaps there is a calling to listen out for pain, despair or brokenness and, calling on God to work through us, to speak comfort, hope and reconciliation where it is needed. Perhaps

there are actions we can take which help to heal wrongs and soothe injury.

We are all called to be disciples, and discipleship follows the ecstatic pattern of Trinitarian love, our love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, sending us out to share that love in the world. Sometimes we feel reticent about that. What I am trying to encourage today is that we each give some careful thought about what our faith gives us to offer the unsettled world we are living in, and above all to offer to those around us during this time. The smallest gifts matter – and once you know what your gift of faith is, you can let go of worrying about how to talk about it or show it – the Spirit of the Father will talk and work through you.

Heavenly Father,
soothe harassed souls with trust in the nearness of your Kingdom,
empower helpless hearts with the courage of your love,
guide us to listen to the voice of Jesus our good shepherd as he
send us to those of your flock who need his care from us, and to
find in meeting them, all that he wants us to share. Amen.