

Matthew 9:35 – 10:14

In today's gospel we have a passage about the nature of being called by God, which Bishop Stephen once described as being **missionary disciples**.

v35-36 Firstly, we have a summary of Jesus ministry, moving around teaching, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, healing the sick, showing compassion for the '*harassed and helpless*' crowds. We could describe Jesus ministry here as '**active caring**'. For us, we seek to imitate Jesus by caring for our neighbours, those homeless, sick or struggling, in whatever ways we can. At the moment this is often by telephone, cards or emails, or by supporting financially or practically where we can.

v37-38 Jesus asks his disciples to be the answer to their own prayers and go and do as he was doing! This searched out those who were willing to actively serve others, separating them from merely curious followers. There is always a challenge in following Jesus.

Chapter 10v1-4 Jesus then chooses twelve of those who showed their willingness to get involved, to be his apostles, his messengers, and sends them out two by two. Notice that they were a very mixed bunch, two sets of brothers, those from different regions of the country, some richer, some poorer, with varied political outlooks and occupations. Jesus calls all people to follow him in company with others who are different to themselves. This presents challenges as well as opportunities to grow in grace.

v5-6 They went because they were sent.

There is no suggestion in the gospels that the disciples went out on their own initiative, simply because they felt like it! They had to be willing, but they were **sent** by Jesus. The ministry and mission was Christ's. What they did was an extension of his work. In addition to being sent by Jesus, there was also the disciples own spiritual understanding that would not allow them to remain silent, as they also felt compassion for others. Outward obedience and inner compulsion led them to share in Jesus' mission.

We are **all** called, and all have different ways of serving, and, I hope, all share that inner compulsion of compassion for others. Jesus took a risk. The disciples had been slow to understand his teaching, but Jesus was willing to trust God to look after them and work through them, as they went out. Jesus gave them specific instructions, and the disciples listened carefully to Jesus before going out. Often we are not good at listening, and can be rather impatient, wanting to see God act now in the way we choose. But **missionary disciples** learn to listen to Jesus first, and then to go out to love as he loved.

v7-10 There is a simplicity to the way these missionary disciples were to live.

Jesus wanted the spreading of the gospel to be central to their lives, other concerns at this time would be a distraction. Later, other matters would also be important and occupy their energies, but for now there is an urgency about getting on with the work. Today we can fill our lives with so much '*baggage*', that the spiritual core of our lives, waiting upon God, responding to the call of God, sharing the gospel in word and action, is squeezed out. In Jesus' own ministry and with the instructions given here to the disciples, there was a concern for the wholeness of people's lives, every part was important. God indeed cares for the whole of our lives, every part of our being.

v11-14 The disciples relied on a welcome for their ministry.

The disciples were not to force themselves or their ministry on people. If they weren't welcome they should leave. People have a God given freedom, and have to be willing to hear and receive good news. This is still true today. We can offer active care to others, and share the good news, but it will not always be welcomed. We are dependent on the Holy Spirit working in people's hearts and minds. eg We have recently been encouraged to pray for others to come to know the love of God in the '*Thy kingdom come*' prayer initiative. Wherever Jesus was welcomed and received, then lives were transformed.

It was the same with the disciples as they went out. When the gospel is proclaimed in word and action, people have to respond in some way. If people do not respond with faith, then in some way Jesus is being rejected. What this means is that in the life of a church, if Jesus is welcomed, listened to, loved, then lives will be changed. The atmosphere of faith, trust and love in a church, as in an individual life, allows the Holy Spirit to act, and the opposite is also true; little faith, little love inhibits the work of God.

We might ask, how welcome is Jesus in our lives and in our church?

So, first we receive from Jesus, then he sends us into his world as **missionary disciples**, to share good news, as we daily seek to show Jesus' care for others in his name. Let us pray for a harvest from our faithful discipleship.