

Jesus sends out the twelve disciples...

... 'Kingdom-Compassion' goes forth

A reflection given on the First Sunday of Trinity, 14th June 2020, by the Associate Vicar, the Revd Wendy Wale in the Online Service

Matthew 9:35-10:8

"Boys and girls, this is 'Miss Brown' and she's going to be your new teacher next year." I can still remember it as vividly as if it was yesterday: that moment when I was first left alone with my class; I was 'Miss Brown'; I was 22 and I'd wanted to teach since I was five; I'd spent the last four years training for this moment. And yet, as 30 expectant faces gazed up at 'Miss Brown', I hoped my smile would cover my shaking knees and sweaty hands as my teaching career officially began: the task of communicating the brand new national curriculum to 30 10-year-olds; newly created plans for literacy, numeracy and this thing called 'technology' that I was utterly clueless about; the greater task of generating a passion for learning and values and skills for life -these underpinned everything every day for the next 15 years.

I share this story as a personal reflection on how the disciples might have been feeling in our reading today: they had spent the past few years following and learning from Jesus; they had seen his miracles; watched him handle criticism and opposition; listen to his public and private teaching; shared his journey in the closest possible way.

And now it's their turn: "People of Israel, this is Simon - he is going to be your teacher; And Andrew - he'll cure your fever; meet James - he can cast out demons; Peter and Bartholemew will cure you of your sicknesses; take your questions to Thomas and Matthew - they will explain my brand new kingdom curriculum, they will generate a passion for kingdom values and skills."

Those first disciples didn't even have the benefits of a salary package, pension or well-stocked classroom. Jesus told them, "You received without payment, give without payment. Don't take anything with you on your journey. Just go and be where people are: cure the sick; raise the debt; cleanse the lepers; cast out demons." Jesus knew that his kingdom, his message of living in a way that subverted the power structures of the current order, his healing, freedom and forgiveness was for the

whole world. But it began with his own people. He saw the crowds and had compassion. They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. It was time to call the twelve, symbolically representing the restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel, sent out to continue his work, his 'kingdom-compassion' that ultimately led to the cross.

On Tuesday, Beverley Minster, we hope, will open its doors to those who long to come and pray within its ancient and hallowed walls. It's been nearly 15 weeks since they shut, perhaps the longest time in its history. It will be a significant and emotional time for some and a small step on our return to the community, choir, concerts, fairs, coffees, groups and glorious acts of worship and celebration that are the life-breath of the bricks and mortar. The minster reminds everybody in Beverley of its presence, from its towering height and chiming clock to the civic services and screeching peregrin falcons; the constant cycle of births, marriages and deaths celebrated there; the countless children with a lifelong passion for choral music; the parents and grandparents finding refuge over a cup of coffee or a chat, time out. As Tom and I were writing a list of volunteer groups the other week, we realised just how many lives are entwined in the wider ministry of the minster.

Jesus still gathers his people together in order to send them out to be agents of transformation. Jesus calls people by name, not because they've been ordained or hold a particular status, not because they are male or female, old or young, black or white or even because they followed him longest or most faithfully. Jesus called fisherman and tax collectors, lepers and outcasts, workaholics and cynics, children and those at the end of their lives. As we meet around the Lord's table, as we remember the cross and pray 'thy kingdom come' whether in the minster or our living rooms or wherever we find ourselves, the invitation is to receive fresh compassion for people and situations that need an experience of his compassion and love, demonstrated at the cross.

Sometimes we're called to the other side of the world, sometimes to simply pick up the phone. We've been in touch with Nick Drayson this week, a former member of the Minster network who was called to Argentina. We keep hearing from COVID-19 'shielding' members of the minster who are just overwhelmed by people's kindnesses: shopping; dog walking; collecting prescriptions; phoning and praying.

'Kingdom-compassion' is what keeps nurses on the COVID-19 wards; carers sitting with the most vulnerable; teachers trying to socially-distance four-year-olds. It's the call for social workers to pursue safeguarding, and politicians to legislate for change. It's the motivation to care for neglected animals or to sponsor a child in Uganda.

I wonder, as we slowly emerge from lockdown into a new kind of normal, as we begin to explore what church might look like in the future, if this might be a time to seek Jesus afresh and ask him to call us by name and fill us with renewed compassion?

- For those who are weary of home-schooling, juggling work and family, of being alone with little to do, feeling ill, worrying about loved ones or grieving:- the call for Jesus might be to come and rest in his love, to experience his peace or reach out for help.
- For those who feel the tasks that lie ahead of them are overwhelming and huge, for whom healing the sick or standing against injustice or pursuing day to day - you feel as daunted as the disciples must have done:- the call for Jesus will be to know the spirit of God, filling and sustaining.
- For all of us:- to join with churches around the world to pray 'thy kingdom come', and to seek what it means to live out those kingdom values in all that we say and do.

During our time of communion this morning, we will hear the following words sung - may they be our prayer for the 'new normal':

*Just as I am without one plea
But that blood was shed for me,
And that thou biddest me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come*

Reading Texts

Matthew 9:35-10:8

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

10 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.'