

Identity and Purpose, ...

... in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

A sermon given on the second Sunday of Trinity 18th June 2023 – by the Revd Ali Doolan, in Beverley Minster

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Well, only a few weeks ago, some of you may have been among the 8.2 million viewers who watched the FA Cup Final. Do you know that the last World Cup Final was followed by 3.4 billion viewers globally? And also that the footballer Cristiano Ronaldo has 564,000,000 followers? It's amazing, isn't it? Why is football so popular? And how does it attract such a diverse group of people from all walks of life, genders, ages, beliefs and values, my family included? Well, psychologists say that football fulfils in people the need for social connection, a sense of belonging and a feeling of being part of a community, a sense of identity. It also gives people a shared purpose. Human beings are relational and need to connect with others and being part of a big fan club means that people can encourage, support and celebrate and commiserate together as their team strives to be the best at working together towards the ultimate prize, the win. And people often have football heroes as role models. People they respect, admire for their skills, for their looks, their success, their wealth, or maybe they have a lifestyle that people would like to emulate and have. However, like everything worldly (and I know this as a Watford supporter) football can also at times be a source of disappointment. For example, when teams do not succeed, are not well managed (we've have more managers, I think, than I've had hot dinners). And when heroes fall from their pedestals.

Do you know what? Jesus longs for us all to have a sense of identity and purpose. We see his compassion and desire for people as he is healing the sick and as he is proclaiming the Gospel, going from town to town - he's absolutely inundated with people flocking to be with Him. But he sees them as sheep without a shepherd.

Our Christian faith gives us a sense of identity and purpose. But unlike football and any other worldly things that we strive for, it is grounded in something that cannot be shaken. It is grounded in something we can trust. For we are trusting in the One who created us, who loves us, and who, by his trinitarian nature, has invited us to join in with that love shared between our heavenly Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. We know that we are loved by the One who died for us on a cross in our place, that we can be a forgiven people and share his risen life.

There are so many times when I want people just to experience the knowledge of God's love for them; to see themselves as God sees them, loved to bits - if we were to look into a mirror and

see ourselves as God sees us, we would be really surprised. We would see ourselves as fearfully and wonderfully made; people whose identity should be and is in Christ. And we're not fans, we're disciples; followers of Jesus; part of Christ's family; children of God; invited to join in with God's purposes for his world. The plan to establish his kingdom here on earth and point people to the most exciting victory of all - God's salvation and redemption.

In our passage today we can see the plan unfolding as Jesus ushers in the kingdom of God. The signs are, as we see in Matthew's Gospel, people being healed by his miracles, his proclamation and teaching and the way in which he overcomes evil and casts out demons. And we witness also the urgency of Jesus's ministry as he goes through all these towns and villages, teaching in every synagogue the good news of the kingdom.

That urgency exists today. It's still as urgent as ever. And our Heavenly Father needs workers.

In our reading, Jesus encourages his disciples to pray for more workers. He describes the crowd as a field ripe for harvest. Well, little did the disciples know that they were going to be the answer to that prayer. They were sent out immediately. And likewise we need to pray for workers and also be prepared ourselves to be answers to that prayer.

Too many people in our world have a lack of self worth, identity and purpose. And one of the biggest diseases of our time is loneliness (I hate the thought of people being lonely). People are not aware of God's love for them and they really do lack a sense of belonging and identity. But you know, many people may be ready to give their lives to Christ if only someone would show them how.

Social studies show that many have belief without belonging. They don't know what it is they are searching for, what their souls long for. They know there's more to life, but they can't articulate it. I believe that it's in our own DNA to long for God. If we're created by Him, that makes sense, doesn't it? We're created to be part of Him, to be in a relationship with Him, to be known and loved by Him. And we are not fully human until that happens.

Jesus chooses the disciples and sends them out immediately into those harvest fields to do ministry in his name. And he has chosen each one of us - each one of us. "What Me?", some of you may say. Well, we can see he chose people from all walks of life: fishermen; tax collectors; power seeking people; political activists; the rich; the poor; the educated; the uneducated. People who would deny Christ, let him down and even betray Him. They were ordinary fallible people sent to do an extraordinary work to take the Gospel to the lost sheep of Israel in order that they in turn might tell the rest of the world about Jesus and share the good news of his kingdom with everyone.

To have your identity grounded in Christ, isn't that amazing? We are God's children. His gift of salvation isn't just for us, it's for everyone. Jesus authorises a powerful ministry to his disciples, even though they're completely clueless at this point as to the meaning and the shape of his wider mission. And that should be encouraging to us, to you and me, to those of us who may lack confidence. The disciples in Matthew obviously still do not have everything figured out, but they are entrusted to preach the message of the Kingdom of God. And they were anointed, as promised, with the power of the Holy Spirit to do his work. We're to do that, to preach the gospel, to care for God's people. And we too must be anointed with God's Holy Spirit - we're not going to do that in our own strength. And we need to read and study the word of God so that we can mirror Jesus and see what he does.

He has compassion for people, we said earlier, and he cares. He looks out especially for those who are vulnerable and helpless: the widow; the orphan; those on the edges of society; the people that no one wants to spend time with. And like the disciples, we have freely received and been showered with the gifts of God's blessing, the knowledge of God's love for us. We're not supposed to keep that to ourselves - we're called to share it, to share that good news of love for the world to others.

The Kingdom of God is at hand today as much as ever, and people need to know that his kingdom is real; he's real and available. But they can only see the joy and the possibilities of that kingdom if we share this good news and witness God's love to the world in word and action.

So what can we do as individuals, you may ask, together as a church to invite others into that kingdom with all the urgent, loving intensity that God's invitation deserves. Well, we're invited to join in with all that God is doing here in Beverley Minster and the wider community; to be a part of the Minster's Vision strategy and get involved with all sorts of different kinds of ministries. Each one of us has been given gifts, each one of us, that we can offer - we are to resemble Christ to the world in word and deed, and accept the call, be obedient to be sent by Jesus, and in some sense, to be sent as Jesus.

This is what pastoral work is and is the responsibility of us all to care for each other. It's not just a few people doing that work, it's everybody. We need to look out as a church for those who are vulnerable. And I'm going to use this opportunity to remind us that if we are concerned for someone we have a responsibility to report that to our Safeguarding Officer. Our safeguarding policy can be found in church and on our website.

There are people on the edge within our church and parish; people who are lonely; people who are elderly; people who are sick; people unable to get around; people who can no longer physically get to church and might welcome support from others. It's not just the job of the vicar

(in my last church there are a few people that used to say well, 'The vicar should go round' - well, how can a vicar do all of that in a church of these sizes?) - we're called to do it together.

And in the Gospel, the disciples very identity is born in the midst of this movement from Father to Son to the world. In John's gospel, Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." So I wonder if you might be able to make a phone call to someone who is lonely, unable to get about; to actively demonstrate God's love and care for them; to ask them how they are, pick up the phone and to listen to them; maybe give somebody a lift to church; perhaps you could visit a person who is lonely, once a week or even just once a month; or support the work in our local care homes; maybe you have noticed that someone has not been in a church for a while and you're concerned for them and you can share that concern; maybe you could be Christ to others by helping to make tea or coffee; or befriend others at our weekly friendship group; or offer hospitality maybe by inviting somebody around for coffee; or maybe cook a very simple meal for them (doesn't have to be much, it's the inviting that's important); perhaps you can help cook breakfast on a Sunday and serve others; or be available to deliver a simple meal to a family who is in crisis; and there's a local food bank or community kitchen (I'm sure Deena would love to talk to you about those things); and maybe you might be good with listening skills and could support those who maybe are bereaved.

If you feel you would like to join in or can join in with any of this work, as pastoral coordinator of this work stream, I would love to meet you, I'd love to have a coffee with you. And I'm sure the pastoral leads (I meant to get a leaflet - there's one at the back if you want to find out who they are) would love to do so also. Because in joining in these areas of ministry, as in other ministry that's done at Beverley Minister, you are participating in the proclamation and healing characteristic of Jesus's own mission that we've seen today in our gospel reading.

And you're getting caught up in the very life and identity of God's Son.

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.'

^{10:1} 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.