

equipping; define focus - know to whom we are being sent, and conduct the mission in word and deed – freely – no fees required.

Through the coupling of names we gather that Jesus sent out the Twelve in pairs. This both provides companionship, but also demonstrates the Spirit's presence in the Body of Christ: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them', (Matt. 18:20). The people the disciples meet are invited into something; they are invited to participate in the Spirit – in a new life – in the life of God. We should not be vague or deceptive in what we offer. Take it or leave it.

When the Twelve arrive in a village, they have to find a way of locking into the community. This means dependence on the people to whom they are sent, common sharing and therefore, the possibility of real communication. There is nothing patronising about this encounter. There is nothing of the missionary campus here! When Jesus sends out his closest followers he sent them to be moved with compassion, and, like Him, to offer love and encouragement. To honour our calling to proclaim the Good News we have to be confident in Christ, but also know that what motivates Jesus should motivate us: to be deeply moved by those we meet. Anything less than this fails to live us to Jesus' example and our vocation.

**Amen.**

The next mission was a trip to Portsmouth for an ecumenical endeavour, but this time we had to stay in one house, eating and drinking whatever they gave us. I was routinely woken at 7am with a cup of tea and a bible reading. We participated in the talks, the quiz night, went to see the Christian stand-up comic in the social club, spoke at church services, and prayed the Jesus prayer with individuals, as well as being the butt of less enthusiastic receptions from the local youth militia. It was worth it, but exhausting and fleeting.

Why share the Good News of Christ? Because proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom lies at the heart of the Christian faith. The Church has shared this mission throughout the centuries in different ways with varying results. Mission is not about forcing our views on others, and, arguably, should not be motivated by the need to find pew fodder. Jesus spoke and acted in the way he did because he was moved with compassion for those around him. They were so lost, rootless and visionless that he could do no other than help them.

The most effective mission is done with a degree of consistency. Mission then and now shares the same sense of urgency. Being rooted in a parish church lends itself to the formation of longer-term relationships and opportunities to mentor and nurture. Trust is a big factor in the success of proclaiming the Good News of God, and trust takes time to build up. The principles of mission outlined in the Gospel passage remain the same; start with prayer, call and

The proclamation and healings of the disciples act as signs of God's new life breaking onto the life of Israel. The new day was dawning with Jesus. Starkly, Jesus tells his disciples to take action to indicate whether people accepted their message in a certain place. There will always be people who choose to say in the night rather than greet the morning. But, there will be consequences as a result of this choice, warns Jesus.

### *College Missions*

When I trained for ministry we were sent out on missions in half-terms and Easter holidays. In the first year you were sent back to a church near the place you called home. I was posted to a church on a huge social housing estate which was doing a week-long evangelistic campaign: putting on meals, talks, films and organising trips to local shops to ask people if they wanted to be prayed for. Picture the scene: A fishing tackle shop, a betting shop, a hairdresser's and a newsagent in a drab concrete block. It was drizzling and the post-it notes were getting soggy. I was all for writing-off this miserable experience but, surprisingly, people did ask to be prayed for and reeled off a list of concerns. Some ignored us, others sniggered, but some were actually pleased we had bothered to be in their place and wanted to talk to them. The best moment was when a man gave me his phone number and invited me on a skiing trip. I'll bet this didn't happen to St. Peter!

people who are sent out. The number twelve is significant, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. Sending out The Twelve was a sign that through Jesus' work, God was at last renewing and restoring Israel. And they were not only a *sign*, but part of the *means* by which God was enacting restoration. The task to evangelise the Gentiles was to be built into the programme after Israel had been given a chance to repent and accept God's kingly rule through the ministry of her Messiah.

I wonder, what fields ripe for harvest is the Lord revealing to us? What should our prayer be? When we can answer that question we may discover that we are part of God's answer.

Jesus gives a very specific set of instructions to the Twelve before they embark on their journeys. The author of the Gospel obviously thinks these details remain relevant to the Church even after Jesus' death and Resurrection. Is there anything these instructions say to the mission of our own church?

When Jesus sends out the Twelve they are not to lord it over others, bragging about being Jesus' closest companions. They are to heal and restore, bring life and hope to people. This is not an exercise in status-seeking, but an exercise in self-giving. They must avoid any accusation that they are in this for the money. Cash, begging bags and provisions are banned. They are to expect hospitality from those who hear and receive their message – which is to be given for free.

*ourselves?*' Jesus has been in the driving seat. He has been the front man, the spokesperson, the miracle worker, the preacher and teacher, taken all the decisions and handled the conflict. Now he hands over his authority to the Twelve and says, 'Your turn'. One can imagine the anxiety, but also the excitement and anticipation.

The anxiety is understandable. Just prior to sending his followers out on mission, Jesus has performed two chapters worth of miracles, culminating with jealous criticism from the Pharisees. They accuse Jesus of acting in league with Satan, '*By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons.*' If they accuse Jesus of this, they will accuse his followers also. If they persecute Jesus, they will persecute his disciples.

What has led to Jesus making the decision to send out his part-baked disciples? In his travels Jesus had observed that the crowds were 'harassed and helpless,' like sheep without a shepherd. They were the 'lost sheep of the House of Israel' – swung this way and that, without prophet or King to guide them. These people were eager to find the Kingdom of God but they did not know where to look for it. They were ready and waiting for God to act, but who would tell them that His action had already begun?

Jesus does not often direct prayer but here his command is specific, '*ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.*' The response to this prayer of the Twelve is speedy and to the point: You are the answer to your own prayer: Israel must hear the message. The Twelve are named and for the first time, are called 'apostles',

## **Matthew 9: 35-10:20**

### **Sending Out Labourers into the Harvest**

*Lord, may it not be I who speak, but the Spirit speaking through me.  
Amen.*

If you have taken a driving test, do you remember the first time you took the car out solo? No driving instructor, no passenger-seat driver telling you to take the first exit off the roundabout. It is a liminal moment; exciting but scary. You take the wheel and make all the decisions.

I remember this very clearly. About three days after taking my test I decided to drive to the edge of Wolverhampton to visit a friend. To get there required navigation through three major conurbations. It was a lunatic decision, but one you make aged 18 in pursuit of a party. I'd been to this friend's house many times before – on the bus. I thought I knew the route intimately.

I knew the route – kind of - observed through misted windows, while reading a book or doing college work. I did not know the exact turn at each junction or the exit at each roundabout. It was more accurate to say that I had a sense impression of how to get there. Pre sat-nav era, I did, only just, make it.

This illustration is a crude way of trying to explain the situation the Twelve are plunged into: *'Seriously, you are sending us out by*