

St Mary & St Michael, Trumpington

Sunday 18th October

Third Sunday Service

Reflection on Luke 10: 1–9

This passage is one of those sections of the Gospel that unexpectedly opens up other areas of the Gospel to me. It's like a key unlocking things that were hidden, or a light that shines to illuminate aspects of Jesus's story that I didn't otherwise appreciate.

The thing is that, when I read the Gospel stories of Jesus, I tend to get an impression that He walked around the countryside with His disciples. He'd visit towns and cities, teach, heal and generally stir up controversy, and then move on somewhere else. And then, eventually, He moved on to Jerusalem, where the political and religious classes had Him killed.

Which is odd, when I think about it, because it doesn't give any real idea of why those leaders found Him so threatening – threatening enough to stage a trial involving the hated occupying power of Rome.

This story, though, connects the dots for me, just a bit. It opens a window into a part of this story that isn't often emphasised.

When Jesus sends out the 70 to prepare the ground for Him, we see that Jesus isn't just an itinerant preacher and healer. He's the leader of a popular movement. He's a political animal, an activist, a would-be revolutionary.

This story shows us not just Jesus but the 'Jesus movement' – the group of people Jesus is using to spread His view of the world and God's Kingdom. His view of the world *as* God's Kingdom.

Jesus gathers 70 of His disciples – by implication, of course, there was a much larger group available to Him! – and sends them out in pairs. That means He has 35 teams spreading His message and preparing the ground. If they spent a week in each place, they'd visit 150 different towns every month!

Jesus is deliberately spreading His word widely. He wants everyone to hear the message that God's Kingdom is coming. And while that message is full of hope and power to many people, it's dangerous for the people who're invested in the current kingdom and its power structures.

It's definitely enough for those political and religious leaders to start seeing the head of this new movement as a threat.

So, Jesus sends these messengers out ahead of Him to prepare the ground. He's sending them 'like sheep among wolves', He says – and I get more of a feel for what He means here given what this Jesus movement clearly looks like.

These messengers are going to towns and villages that already have religious leaders, synagogues, an established order. But the messengers' job is to disrupt that, to ask difficult questions, to bring news of change and of a different way of living and being with God.

No wonder Jesus has to prepare them for the possibility of rejection. So Jesus does prepare them.

He sends them out in pairs. This is vitally important and something that our modern-day church so often fails to do. Having someone alongside you in the work matters. It's someone to support you when things are hard. Someone to point you in the right direction when you wander. Someone to share your passion for the work. And someone to moan to when things are hard!

Having companionship in a task makes hard tasks possible, so Jesus makes sure His messengers have companionship.

But that's all He tells them to take. Take a companion but no shoes, no bag, no purse. Don't greet anyone and get side-tracked. Go to a town and look for welcome, but don't keep searching for the 'best' person to be a guest of. Once you're accepted, stay there.

Eat what they give you, which means not to complain if it's bad, but also not to make a fuss if it's too good. This is something St Francis also told his brothers: if you dine with someone, eat what they give you. Even if it's a wealthy family, eat it. If it's a Friday and they serve you beef instead of fish, eat it. If you're vegetarian and they serve you meat, eat it.

And, above all, share God's peace. From the moment you first enter a house in the town, share God's peace, even if that peace isn't reflected back to you.

As long as the town welcomes you then eat, work, heal and share the news of God's Kingdom that Jesus Himself was proclaiming.

This sort of work takes great trust – in Jesus, and also in the people in towns spread across the countryside. Sure, there was a strong tradition of hospitality, but they are still people. Some of them will disappoint you. Others will see you as a vagrant or an opportunist. Some will say you're a heretic or a dissident!

But, Jesus says, even though you're like sheep going among wolves, still you should go. And remain sheep, not wolves. Don't use the world's power or means. Don't take money or offer payment.

Don't pay your way, but do share what you have – share the presence of God's Kingdom, share healing, share peace.

And, finally, this is where the message inevitably comes home to us. Because we're still Jesus's disciples, and He still wants his people to spread the news that God's Kingdom is coming near, to heal the sick, to share peace wherever they are welcome.

As Mandy said last week, a healthy church, a healthy part of the Jesus Movement, attracts people by being itself, openly and welcomingly. But doing this takes attention and care to live the Kingdom's values.

We are still told by Jesus to go ahead of Him into all the places in this world – to show people His Kingdom and how good it is, to share His peace, and to offer them the chance to respond.

We are still told by Jesus to be like sheep among wolves – to confront the powers of this world, both religious and secular, with the radical and powerful news that God's Kingdom has come near.

We are still told by Jesus to live among the people, to eat with them, work with them, rest with them, and to live out the example Jesus has set us.

As I said at the start, this is one of those passages that, for me, unexpectedly sheds light on many things. And one message it holds that I can't escape is that Jesus gathered His disciples, instructed them, supported them and, yes, sent them out. To every town, every village, every home, every single human heart.

And Jesus still sends us now.

In these days, the body of Jesus is us. We are His feet, mouth, eyes and hands. If Jesus is to go anywhere, He must send us there first. We make Him known.

On Sundays, it's easy to locate ourselves in the Church, even when it's online! We hear the words, sing the songs, pray and draw near to Jesus – who is after all the entire point of church!

But there's so much more to life than Sunday! Jesus doesn't just want us to come and learn. He wants to send us out, to share what we've learned. To say, "Peace be with this house," and to bring healing wherever we go.

When the disciples return from this huge mission of spreading the news of the Kingdom, they're eager to tell Jesus that they've had huge success – even the demons submit to them, they tell Him. They've experienced the power of the Kingdom, the power of Jesus's name to heal and bring peace.

But Jesus tells them: don't rejoice in your success, or power, or even in having survived. Rejoice simply that your name is written in heaven.

When the disciples go out, they go ahead of Jesus. When we go out, we go ahead of Jesus. But, for the disciples and also for us, we cannot travel faster than Jesus does. God is already at work in every human heart, friend and stranger.

Our job is to go and take part in God's work. To share our experience of Jesus, to spur people to health and to action.

And to return to Jesus full of joy and confidence in His power in the world, to be reminded that what matters is simply that our names are written in heaven.

For that is enough: that we belong to Jesus. And that, belonging, we are sent out to spread the Kingdom.