

Pp: SENT OUT INTO THE WORLD: THEN & NOW (Matthew 9-10/ Luke 10)

I remember when I was 17, fresh out of High School and about to leave home & move cities for the first time. I was pretty nervous and even more so when it dawned on me that I would be doing it alone. I had to organise myself. Who would book my hair appointments? Who would do my shopping? All of a sudden life seemed a whole lot bigger AND scarier.

Just before I parted from my parents they gave me all sorts of advice and instructions on what to do, (and not to do). To be honest I can't remember much of what they said, (lol), but I'm sure it was some sage advice. Some of which, undoubtedly, I took on-board. Thinking back they were probably just as nervous as I was about leaving. Although being the youngest of three and the last to leave the roost they were well practiced. But even still I think at this point they must have been thinking things like, "I hope we prepared him for this. What if he fails? What if our example wasn't good enough? I should have told him about... He's not ready, he's too young" I wonder if Jesus was having similar doubts about the disciples? Whether he felt they were not ready to do it alone. Interestingly, if he did it did not stop him from releasing them to practice and learn on the road.

I could also imagine that when the disciples were sent out by Jesus they would have had felt a similar fear I felt about leaving home. Even though they had the best teacher, all of a sudden the mission lay in their hands. I wonder how unprepared they felt when faced with the reality of doing mission for themselves without Jesus?

Pp: In Luke when Jesus sends out the 72 and they return later there is the cute little bit where they are giddy with joy:

This is quite possibly the stuff most parents want to hear their child say some time after leaving home, "I did what you said and it worked." We can be hopeful I guess.

It's this advice Jesus gave them I'd like to explore this morning. I would also like to add the sending of the 72 from Luke 10 into the mix as I think that adds some interesting directions from Jesus. What did Jesus's directions for mission mean then and what does it possibly mean for us today.

Pp "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." (v. 5-6)

That word 'Go' is a powerful word. It's a word that should make us truly think how we do mission. It's a word that reminds us that the church is not to spend all it's time waiting for people to come to us, trying to attract people with super-duper events and displays of entertainment. It simply means go to the world instead of waiting for it to come to us –because they probably won't.

But why did Jesus direct them to go to Israel only? Firstly, we need to acknowledge that later on in the great commission at 28:19–20 Jesus declares mission to the whole world. Jesus' attention to

Israel simply acknowledges that the covenant was first made with Israel. That they would be a blessing to the world. So it makes sense that here Jesus would start with the very people to whom this covenant was given.

While there is no direct command for us in relation to going to Israel first there is the principal that we too start 'local.' We are not all called to go to the nations [much to the joy of some: pp]. But in Jesus' words we see a calling to our households, our own family, and our own neighbourhoods. Mission is not something only done in other countries. It is the fruit of the lives of believers where they happen to be. I wonder if to us Jesus would say...

Pp Do not go overseas if God has not called you to. Go rather to the lost sheep in your neighbourhood, your workplace, your schools and where you find yourself...

Pp "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven [God] has come near.'" (v. 7)

This message is the same that John the Baptist and Jesus himself proclaimed. But what does it mean? Surely, it can't be what we have come to call the gospel considering that the events that Christians have traditionally proclaimed about the cross, sin and salvation had not even happened yet. To the Jewish people it meant something. And it is important that we too understand what this message about the KOG is. Great bible scholar Gordon Fee once said,

pp "You cannot know anything about Jesus, *anything*, if you miss the kingdom of God You are zero on Jesus if you don't understand this term. I'm sorry to say it that strongly, but this is the great failure of evangelical Christianity. We have had Jesus without the kingdom of God, and therefore have literally done Jesus in."

This KOG is vital to mission. 'Kingdom of God' appears 53 times in the N.T. and "kingdom of heaven," appears 32 times (combined 85 x). The KOG is a whole series of sermons and I cannot even touch on it too much today but in a nutshell Jesus' core message could be understood to mean:

"That God's reign has started now. The time spoken about by the prophets is now. The reign of God has now come. God is working here and now to make things 'on Earth as they are in heaven' (recognise that para-phrase?). So turn your life around and live in light of this truth."

Such a proclamation would remind Jesus' Jewish audience of such scriptures as Isaiah 52:7-10:

Pp: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "*Your God reigns.*" Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth

shall see the salvation of our God.

Of course Jesus himself is the one who has kick-started this project, which is where the cross comes into it. Jesus demonstrated heaven on Earth in his life and ministry (and his very divine/human nature). He bridged that gap between Earth and heaven (us and God), reconciled the two spheres and died doing it.

Just as Jesus proclaimed something that the Jews would understand. I honestly think we need to re-evaluate our own sharing of the good news. What exactly are we sharing? The good news is more than individual salvation, forgiveness of sins and a ticket to “heaven”. So much more. But that too is another sermon.

Pp ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.’ (v. 8)

These things that Jesus asks of his disciples are the very things that he himself did. They are demonstrations of the Kingdom, heaven on Earth, where death is no more, there are no more tears, evil powers or sickness. Taken literally they are challenging requests. Particularly raising the dead. Who here has raised the dead or has seen it happen (I’d love to know the details)? No shame.

One commentary made the interesting observation that; “We have no record that the disciples did in fact “raise the dead” during Jesus’ lifetime... if Matthew’s church was used to seeing the dead raised, it has left remarkably little evidence of it, and one can only speculate as to whether Matthew or his readers interpreted this.”

I don’t want to minimise Jesus’ words and I think that we can take these at face value as things that could and have sometimes happened but they are indeed rare occasions.

What strikes about this list is:

1) As mentioned, they are all miracles that Jesus himself performed. This highlights to us how much we need to walk in his shoes and emulate him to the best of our gifts and abilities.

2) They are all situations which would isolate and dehumanise people in that time. Those who appear to be possessed were generally locked away or kept hidden, those with leprosy and those who are sick were unclean and so kept at a distance, and of course being dead is a bit of a social barrier. The KOG is about restoring and healing people into life-giving community with others and God.

3) They were also helpless situations. There was little medical treatment and no public health back then, no psychologists or specialists. They were at the whims of these situations. In desperate need.

A part of our being sent is to believe that the miraculous can happen but part of that is to discern the needs of those to whom we are sent. Is there anything isolating them from community? From being human? What are their needs? Where do they need the Kingdom to touch them? What can we as Christians bring that no medical professional etc can bring as a demonstration of God's Kingdom? William Booth (founder of the Salvation army) once said of the starving people they were ministering too:

pp "But what is the use of preaching the Gospel to men whose whole attention is concentrated upon a mad, desperate struggle to keep themselves alive?"

If we ignore the needs of the people then we simply do not demonstrate the Kingdom to them. We do not give God the opportunity to show his love & power through us and despite us.

Pp ""'Freely you have received; freely give.' Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you.' (v. 8b-13)

From Luke 10:3-8: ' Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals... Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you...'

Having received the message of the kingdom of God "free of charge" through Jesus, the disciples are to minister in the world without expecting material reward. Additionally, they are to go with the very basics they need and to pack lightly even neglecting to take their purse.

I don't know about you but before I go anywhere I do the phone, keys wallet dance. What is Jesus up to here? Don't take your wallet?

Essentially Jesus is asking, "are you prepared to be sent without a moments notice, depending not on your own abilities, and means but on that of God alone?"

They are to allow themselves to be dependent on the hospitality of others. They are not to go as self-sufficient people who have everything in hand, who have it all under control and can make things happen. That is not how the Kingdom operates. The Kingdom has an important task which can only be achieved through reliance and dependence on God. So leave your self-sufficiency, your money and your bag of tricks at home. The Kingdom has no place for those who are likely to fulfil their own agendas. Instead, go without an agenda other than dependence on God to discern and minister to the needs of the people, to reveal God's power and his good news.

For us; this does not mean that we go barefoot, and without our wallets as we go into the world. But what it does mean is that we do not go thinking that we know exactly what to do and say brandishing a professional and polished approach to mission. When we come across as the already sorted Christian professional, without need, perfect, we can close the door to people's hearts. No-one wants their own weaknesses and inabilities exposed by someone who appears to have it all together and is proud of that fact. We need to allow ourselves to be served, as much as serve, and to accept and receive hospitality and help.

We should not approach mission as mini-saviours who have everything to give and in need of nothing. Instead, we go with humility, ears to hear the needs of the people, ears to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, and mouths to speak of the love of God that has sent us there; as witnesses to the real Saviour.

As you enter the home, give it your greeting. ¹³ If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.

Time is pressing but all I would like to say here is do not go where you are not welcomed. Don't trap yourselves into conversations. The good news is never to be enforced on anyone and when Christians forget this, it never bodes well. Move on.

I knew a self-proclaimed 'evangelist' his method was to corner, trap people into 'submission' uncomfortable, no opportunity to accept or deny what he had to offer. It's not gospel and it's not helpful.

So in your 'going out' know that even the disciples were (**pp**) anxious. But to go, is a very powerful way to learn. We are asked to (**pp**) go and for most of us that means being sent to where we already are; work, home, neighbour, school etc. Be prepared to see (**pp**) miracles, but also be prepared to listen to the needs of those around you. Be ready to tell the (**pp**) good news that God is making things right again and that we can be a part of this. But do it in ways that fit naturally into the needs and longings of the people. Go without (**pp**) agenda and be dependent on God rather than a method. Trust God and allow those you are sent to, to also serve you. Be humble. And finally (**pp**) do not go, where you are not wanted... trust God's work.

