

LUKE 10:1-11
SHARE THE GOOD NEWS!

It's not quite grain harvest time, yet - the crops are still growing in the fields. It is harvest time for other fruit and veg, though: tomatoes, strawberries, rasps (under cover). For some crops harvest time is past – British asparagus is harvested in May and June and so that harvest is over for another year. This is the picture that Jesus uses to talk about mission: this is about people, people who are waiting to hear the gospel and who are ready to come to faith in Jesus, people whom Jesus described elsewhere as “harassed and helpless”, looking for spiritual leadership and direction, but not knowing where to find it, ready to be told good news! The harvest is ready!

We assume that people are not interested in the gospel. About 3% of Edinburgh people come to Church on a Sunday morning; what about the other 97%. 7% are members of the Church of Scotland; what about the other 93%? Some are members of other churches and belong to other faiths. We assume that the rest are just not interested because they don't come to Church at all, never mind regularly. Are we right? Is that a correct assumption? I suspect not entirely. There are people out there who are looking for answers to big questions; there are parents who want the best for their children; there are others whose lives are consumed by fears and guilt, by the stresses and pressures of life, who would love to find a better way of dealing with these fears, or a better way of ordering their life. This is the harvest field of people waiting to hear the good news; Luke 10 tells us what we are to do.

Jesus recruits 72 people to go into the towns and villages to tell people about him. Here is what he told them to do.

The first thing Jesus tells us to do is pray. “*The harvest...*” (v.2) “Ask”. We read these statistics about Church attendance and membership in the city and can feel quite overwhelmed. The task is impossible; we simply can't do anything about it at all! I look at the new housing developments in parts of the city and there are lots of people in small areas and the churches in that part of the city might be small, weaker churches, who just don't have the resources of people or money to be able to address their new situation; they feel overwhelmed and the temptation is simply to curl up in the corner and do nothing. Prayer is the right response to feeling overwhelmed; that is true in any situation, it is certainly true in this situation. When we pray, we admit that we can't do this on our own, but that we need the strength and grace that God supplies. Mission is something that God does; prayer recognises that. Jesus says ‘pray’ and the specific prayer is to ask God to send workers out into the harvest fields, that there would be people ready, willing, able to tell others about Jesus.

Then Jesus says “Go” “*Go! I am...*” (v.3) In moment we'll see what Jesus is sending them to do, but a first thought: this is the same group of people! It is the same people to whom He says “Ask” He then says “Go!” Sometimes we are the answer to our own prayers. I've told you before about Lisa Sullivan, an American youth activist in Washington DC who died at the age of 40. Whenever people complained that there were no leaders, no people to take on responsibility (“Where is the next Martin Luther King?”), she would declare “We are the ones we have been waiting for!” It is an urging for people to take responsibility for their situations, for people of faith who believe and hope that world can be changed to take on responsibility for their situations, because that is how the world is changed. Are we the people we are praying for? Is that how it is? To the same group of people, Jesus says “Ask” and then “go”.

These two commands show us something hugely important about mission. It is a partnership. We've said already, before and often that mission is something God does; "It is not the Church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father than includes the Church." (Moltmann) God has a mission to bless the world, to save the world and has sent Jesus to fulfil that plan and His Spirit is at work in our world today drawing people to Jesus and we have seen that happen in our community in last few months; the Spirit at work and we have to run to catch up. But this is not God on His own; we are called to be partners with God in His mission and we have a part to play in that mission. Our part is to tell people about Jesus, to tell people that Jesus is Lord; to tell people the stories of Jesus so that people have an idea of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done and how great Jesus is and how much He is to be believed and trusted. That is our part in this partnership that is mission. God has chosen to work through us.

So we "go". There was a time when 'going' was thought to mean becoming a missionary overseas. Countries outside the UK and Europe were seen as 'the mission field' and so this command to 'go' was seen as a challenge to travel the world, to places in Africa, India, and China to tell people who had never heard the gospel. Now we would agree that Scotland is as big a mission field on its own. I conducted an Assembly in Currie High School at Easter, simply telling first and second year pupils the Easter story and a significant number of them said afterwards that they'd never heard that story before. How can people believe in Jesus if they've never heard about Him? We don't need to leave home to 'go', but we need to engage with our families, friends, neighbours, people in our street, people we work beside, people we take leisure beside and pray that God will give us opportunities to speak about important issues and to tell the stories of Jesus and pray that God give us courage to take these opportunities and wisdom to know how to take them well.

This challenge to mission makes us trust God all over again. As we said, that was what lay behind instruction: "*Do not...*" (v.4) Jesus' disciples were to depend on God to provide very practical things like food, a place to stay for night; they were to take no money of their own, no luggage, no spare sandals, but all of that was to inspire a sense of trust. God provided for them through the ordinary hospitality of other people, in ordinary ways! Our circumstances are different, but that sense of faith, trust, reliance on God is no different. Our prayers might be a little different: we pray for opportunities to speak, strength and courage to take these opportunities, a sense of God helping us to know what to say and how to say it, what to do and how to do it. We do none of this in our own strength, but strengthened and helped by God, we change the world! This might be one of the benefits of a church in crisis in Scotland: there is not enough money, the church is confused and divided, congregations are at their wits' end – rather than depending on our own wit and wisdom, we might learn to rely on God again, to trust God, to depend on God for our future.

Jesus tells His disciples how to go about this mission: "*When you...*" (v8f) There are two things here: first of all, "care for people you meet" and for them that would include having power to heal people. To have a reputation for caring is not all that the Church needs, but it is a huge first step. For the Church to be known as group who cares for people in need in the community says so much about Jesus. So often Churches have the reputation for people falling out with one another, being full of cliques, so for the Church to be seen in the community as people who care for those in need is huge step in right direction. This is the first part of mission: to care for the people you meet. This is not just for the church as a group, but for Christians individually, to care for the people you meet in daily life, to take a genuine interest in the lives of others, to be concerned enough to ask after their health and well-being and if they tell you about their family, remember what they tell you and ask again

another time. Visit people in hospital; take note of people who are ill; remember those who are housebound; provide hospitality for the stranger. Care for the people we meet.

Secondly, tell them about Jesus; *"tell them..."* (v9) *"When you..."* (v5) Jesus is King and Lord, a message of peace. The centre of the message is Jesus : *"May I..."* (Gal 6:14) was Paul's version! We are not telling people about ourselves, not even about our Church, but we are to tell people about Jesus and the great things He has done. That is the message the Church must proclaim; we are not really in business of saying to the people of Edinburgh 'come to Church'; we are in the business of saying "Look at Jesus; see what He has done; come to Jesus!" In our conversations with people, it is even possible to tell our story of faith in such a way that it is all about us and 'how good my faith is and because this has happened to me, this needs to happen to you in same way!' No, we must always point people to Jesus, as King and Lord over life, as a great and glorious figure, but also as One who came to serve, to suffer and be crucified as the Saviour of the world and the One who brings peace!

One last thing: we can't control how people will react so don't worry about it! *"When you..."* (v8) *"When you..."* (v10f) People will react in all kinds of ways to the good news about Jesus: some will think it the best thing they've ever heard and will believe; others will think it nonsense and will refuse to believe. There is nothing we can do to control that reaction; all we can do is remain faithful to our calling to serve God. *"He who..."* (v16) This is our privilege: as we speak, people encounter Christ; through our words, weak, faltering, feeble words they may be and through our care for people in need, people encounter Christ. Some will believe Him and find in Him all that we have said and far more; others will not believe and will go on with life in another way; others will come back later to the stories of Jesus and will come to faith later. None of this is in our gift, none of it is in our control. All we can do is care for people in need and tell them about Jesus; the rest is up to them.

A little bit of faith and a little bit of hope can change the world. These are difficult days for Churches in Edinburgh and in Scotland. So we are challenged by Jesus to pray: *"Ask..."* So we are challenged by Jesus to *"Go!"* Maybe we will even be the answer to our own prayers. We celebrate a God who has done great things in the world. We still have a Saviour who is able to save completely. We still have a gospel that changes peoples' lives for the better. The Spirit of God is still at work, drawing people to Jesus. There is a harvest field; there are people in our community longing to hear something that will give them hope and peace, that will overcome their guilt and their fears. Jesus does all of that; how can they believe if they don't know? How will they know unless we tell them? *"Ask..."* *"Go!"*

EXCESS BAGGAGE

Have you ever gone to the Airport with too much luggage? You've packed too many clothes or got too many souvenirs for the way home? You've got "excess baggage" says the person at the desk. You have 2 choices:

- 1) take some of it out, and repack the suitcase till it is within the weight limit and you leave the rest behind, which is OK if you're leaving home and someone is at the airport to take your stuff away with them for you; otherwise you might just have to throw the clothes/souvenirs in the bin!
- 2) pay excess; some airlines make you pay for baggage anyway now, but there is a limit on what you can take and if you go beyond that limit you pay extra; you might pay extra to make sure that all of your baggage is taken home for you.

Jesus sent 72 people out into the towns and villages ahead of Him; He told them to go and tell people that he was coming so that they would welcome Him when He came later. He told them to travel lightly, to take no purse, no bag, no (extra!) sandals, just the pair they were wearing; not even to stop to chat to people they met on the road. They were to take no luggage, no suitcase, no sleeping bag, just to go as they were.

There were two reasons: 1)to trust in and rely on God: they were to depend on God to provide for them wherever they went and time after time God provided for them by the hospitality of others; people gave them food to eat, gave them a bed for night, gave them what they needed; so God provided and they learned to trust God and to let nothing get in the way of learning that lesson.

2)to concentrate on the message: they were to proclaim that Jesus is King and Lord, 'the kingdom of God is near'. That was their message and nothing was to get in the way of that message. They were to tell people that Jesus is Lord and people were to hear that message; that mattered more than anything according to Jesus.

Churches are called to trust God and proclaim Kingdom of God, but all kinds of excess baggage around for some, things that get in the way of doing that:

- A building that seats 1000+ with a worshipping congregation of less than 100 and that is drain on their finances
- "This is way we've always done things" and the implication is that this way we always will even if that way is suited more to 1910 than 2010!
- Complicated church structures that take up lots of time and energy just to run church
- The history of the church, looking back to good old days and wishing it was that way now!
- Personal faults and mistakes

Whatever it is, if there is something that gets in way of people trusting God and telling others than Jesus is king, that takes time and energy away from trusting God and telling people about Jesus, then maybe that is excess baggage that we need to be rid of! There are two things we are always to do: 1)trust God; 2)tell people about Jesus.