

MATTHEW 10:1-16
LEARNING TO DEPEND

I want to do something slightly different to begin this morning:
turn to person sitting next to you and tell them:

- Your favourite colour;
- The first line of your address (not to worry, no-one's making notes!)
- The thing you've liked best about this service so far!

You've done something unusual; you've talked to one another at a point in the service when you'd expect to be listening; has that taken you outside of your comfort zone? For some of you, I expect it might! That might be true in two respects: first of all, in talking during the church service when you'd not expect to do that and for some, you will be uncomfortable with that; secondly, you've told someone a piece of personal information: it is easy when it is simply a colour, it is slightly more difficult when it is your address, then the conversation level dropped slightly with the third one because we're not sure that we want to express that kind of opinion on what is a personal matter, worship, faith, our experience of worship. So, we move outside our comfort zone.

We played a DVD short story:

Have a look at this: it is from the General Assembly of 2005, and features the excellent Adrian Plass's version of our Bible reading; you will see some faces you might recognize, a little bit younger than you'll know them now; the piece should make you smile, but it might also make you think.

Matthew 10 tells the story of Jesus sending out His disciples into the towns and villages, what they are to do and how they are to go about it. It is full of commands and how they are to go about this task and the privilege that Jesus accords them in this ministry. What Plass does in his tongue-in-cheek version is to highlight for us just how much these people are going to be out of their comfort zone, just how new this challenge is for them and just how many questions and objections they might have raised and that have gone unrecorded. They had to learn to depend; it was an exercise in faith; they had to depend on Jesus, that what He said would happen, would actually happen; they had to depend on God to provide for them; they had to depend on other people to welcome them.

The disciples had been watching Jesus. He had healed the sick; He had driven out evil spirits; He had preached about the kingdom of God. Now He is commanding them to go to do the same: "*as you...*" (*Matthew 10:7f*) Their mission runs alongside Jesus' ministry and is derived from it. They are being asked to do what they had seen Jesus do. So they are commanded to go and do these things. They are not given any option, it would seem. They are placed in a situation where they are being asked to do something totally new; it would be naïve to think that they all embraced this whole-heartedly, without questions; they must have had questions, doubts, feelings of inadequacy, huge uncertainties about the whole enterprise. There is no detailed record of the trip, but they went; they did as Jesus commanded. For all that this represented a huge risk for them, they went; they did as Jesus commanded them and they saw God at work through their ministry.

They learned to depend: "*Do not...*" (*Matthew 10:9f*) "no previous fund-raising is necessary, nor need any special equipment be acquired. They can go just as they are and the mission is urgent." (France) Jesus promises them that they will be provided for; the people they meet will give them food to eat and places to stay; they will be welcomed

gladly by some and all their needs will be met. So no hiking boots, no toilet bags etc. They are to go, trusting that Jesus' promises will come true; this whole enterprise is a huge act of faith. Hudson Taylor was an English missionary in the nineteenth century; he decided that God was calling him to China and he went; he did no fund-raising, but went out entirely in the faith that God would provide for him; he founded what became the China Inland Mission and is today OMF, working in East Asia to bring the gospel to the billions of people living in that part of the world; it is a faith mission, trusting God to provide, doing no fund-raising, but simply telling people their need and letting the Spirit prompt people to give. The disciples learned to depend; Hudson Taylor learned to depend; neither was disappointed!

There were difficulties: *"If anyone..." (Matthew 10:14)* There would be times when people responded badly; the disciples would not be universally welcome and they are to be prepared for that. Shaking the dust off their feet is a way of saying "we have done our job; your reaction is your responsibility". Jesus is open and honest with them; *"I am..." (Matthew 10:16a)*; "don't be naïve; *"be as..." (v16b)* Wisdom, prudence, sensitivity to their situation – these are the qualities which the disciples are to learn; be street-wise, but still be honest and gracious.

Ministry is an enormous privilege: *"Freely..." (Matthew 10:8)* *"He who..." (v40)* "God Himself enters the house with Jesus' messengers. What a statement!" (Jeremias) The disciples had seen Jesus heal; some of them had been on the receiving end of that healing and grace and forgiveness; as they had received so they were to give to others. They were to share something of Jesus with the people they met; they were to bring Jesus' peace, grace and power into broken lives and watch as the power of God went to work; they saw people healed, others restored, some forgiven and all through their ministry. Wisely they would realise that this is not their ministry, but is God's mission at work through them! Again they learned to depend on God and His power and grace for their ministry to be effective in the world.

What takes us out of our comfort zone? The Church's relationship with Scotland is not exactly comfortable; mission becomes a huge challenge, and we become afraid of people rejecting our message. Our circumstances take us out of our comfort zone, dealing with situations that are new: we have never dealt with this before and had no concept of ever having to deal with some things we have to face. Our job can take us out of our comfort zone, placing us in situations that are new, where we have to learn new skills and build new relationships. New responsibilities in Church, or the community, come along and we feel daunted or threatened by the very thought of them.

Our instinctive reaction is to avoid them, to turn away from these kinds of situations, a sort of flight reaction; so we avoid situations which take us out of our comfort zone. In fact, as Christians, there is another possibility: we learn to depend. We learn to trust Jesus. Jesus promises to be with us always and everywhere and that includes outside our comfort zones; so we trust the promise that He is with us and He will help us. We learn to depend on Jesus when the mission of the Church is a huge challenge in secular Scotland; we learn to depend on Jesus when we're in new situations, difficult situations; we learn to depend on Jesus when work makes demands of us that are new and we're having to learn new skills; we learn to depend on Jesus when there are new responsibilities in Church, or new opportunities for discipleship and service that we know we should take, but they scare us. Instead of running away from these things and pretending they don't exist, we learn to depend on Jesus.

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“The life...” (Galatians 2:20) Paul learned to depend on Jesus. He grew up believing that salvation was his own job and that he had to do enough to earn God’s favour. When he heard the gospel, he learned to depend on Jesus. He discovered that Jesus loved him and that Jesus died for him and that Jesus had won God’s favour on Paul’s behalf; all he had to do was believe. He learned to depend on Jesus and his whole life was lived, depending on Jesus. There is something in us that wants to be in control and we don’t like times when we’re not! We want everything to be ‘just so’ and uncertainty leaves us afraid, or anxious. It is good to learn to depend on Jesus; the disciples had to depend on Him and His promises; He was not found wanting. It is good to learn to depend on Jesus; that does not make everything easy, nor straightforward, but it will be good. Learn to depend on Jesus in everything; He is worthy of that faith and trust.