

MATTHEW 9:35-10:12
 FLOURISHING COMMUNITIES

I saw this sign on Monday outside Marks and Spencer at the Gyle Shopping centre: “Good deeds make great communities!” I might want to change it a little, but I’m fascinated by the concern! The staff inside are wearing t-shirts that tell you they are working to create communities. At the General Assembly last month, one of the Church’s councils has a report that speaks about “flourishing local communities”: what makes a flourishing community? Part of the answer was: people who take responsibility for place they live in and for the people who live beside them, communities that where our children and grand-children can grow up safe and happy and want to live there; communities that are well-provided for and where there are amenities and good relationships. As part of that discussion, I raised the question of what prevents communities from flourishing and suggested as an example the loss of banks! We would want to add that a flourishing community has a strong church, committed to mission and ready to care for the people around about us. Do you know the city motto of Glasgow? “Let Glasgow flourish...by the preaching of the word!” This may be something that only we see, that communities really flourish by having a sense of God at their heart and having a church that is ready to share what we believe.

We’re going to look this morning at mission through the eyes of Jesus and His disciples. Our mission in our communities has to be shaped by Jesus; what we see of Him and in Him is vital. Before we do that, a first thought. Matthew tells us that “*Jesus went...*” (*Matthew 9:35*) and we have a real sense of this travelling preacher, going from place to place, preaching, teaching and healing; people react to Him in different ways. But here’s my intriguing question of this passage: the disciples are then sent out to towns and villages on their mission. Is it the same towns and villages? Are they sent to places that Jesus had just visited? Are they following on behind Him, so that their mission is based on what He has done? Are they going back to places where Jesus has been, telling people what it all means? “*The kingdom...*” (*Matthew 10:7*) Whatever the answer to these villages, one thing is clear: our mission in our communities is shaped by Jesus’ mission in the world; our job is to show people what Jesus is like, to point people to Jesus, to love people in Jesus’ name. There are some things that Jesus does that matter, that we should do too.

We will look at five words; I’m indebted to Michael Green for these five words.

See What do we see when we look around us at our community? What do we see when we look at people’s lives or at the world? Matthew tells us what Jesus saw: “*When he...*” (*Matthew 9:36*) He saw people in need; He saw people whose deepest needs were going unmet; people who were not cared for but being torn apart and thrown down, harassed and helpless and all through lack of leadership; there was no shepherd! Jesus saw people in need. What do we see in our world? We see what makes the news headlines: a tragic fire in London this week; the way in which political leaders react to our General Election; we see leaders across the world and how they behave. Do we see what goes on behind the headlines, people who are hungry, thirsty, women, girls who run the gauntlet of fear just to go to toilet, refugees by the million in Lebanon? That is also part of our world’s story. What do we see in our community? We see people who are reasonably prosperous, for whom life is sorted, perhaps, but do we see the fears and anxieties? Do we see broken relationships and spiritual needs? Do we see people who have no faith, wandering, lost, harassed and helpless and in need of a Saviour? Do we see that too? What do we see?

Care How do we react to what we see? There are all kinds of possible reactions. Jesus’ reaction: “*he had...*” (*Matthew 9:36*) This is His “gut-reaction” to what He sees; compassion, feeling with people in their pain, a “fellow-feeling”. Another time, Jesus was in tears because He saw a city that had turned its back on God, that didn’t recognise the time when God came to the city and Jesus wept over Jerusalem. How do we react to the things we see in our world?

There are times when we feel helpless to do anything, but even in these times, there should be a sense of compassion, a fellow-feeling with people who suffer. Unless we've been caught in a tower block fire, we never really know how it feels, but our hearts go out to people who are looking for their families. We see people who have no faith, struggling to make sense of life and our hearts go out to them, we feel for them and want to help; we see people who are hurting, caring for someone and it is demanding, and they are exhausted and our hearts go out to them and we want to care, support and help. There was a time in the mid-1980's when there were so many pictures of famine in Africa and the demands being made on us, that people started to talk about "compassion fatigue": were we tired of caring? What we see leads us to care for people who are harassed and helpless.

Pray Jesus tells us to pray: "*Then...*" (*Matthew 9:37f*) People are ready to respond to gospel; God is looking for people to engage in mission; the disciples are urged to pray for God to raise up people who will engage in mission in their communities. What chapter 10 shows us is that the disciples also needed to be the answer to their own prayers. Mission is something God does; God is at work in the world; prayer reminds us that mission is a partnership between God and His people. Our General Assembly again: the Assembly "issues a call to the church to pray that God will do a fresh work amongst us as God's people." Prayer is our response to what we see in the world and is a deep expression of our care for people in need; we should pray for people we know who are harassed and helpless; we should pray for our community and its people, for its groups, its organisations, and the church's place in all of that; we should pray for our families and friends who are struggling with life; and pray for people who don't know Jesus and have no Christian faith that they might find faith and a sense of God in their lives. We see, we care, we pray.

Receive "*He called...*" (*Matthew 10:1*) "*These twelve...*" (*Matthew 10:5*) They were given authority by Jesus; they were given instructions, a whole set of things to do and not to do as they went through towns and villages. There was something else they had already received: a model for mission – these twelve had been with Jesus when He went through these towns and villages and they were to do what Jesus did and in the way Jesus did it! "*At that...*" (*Matthew 10:20f*) They will be given power and grace by the Spirit to know what to say and how to say it. We receive courage and strength, in the power of the Spirit, so that we are able to be the people Jesus has called us to be; we don't do mission in our own strength, but Jesus gives us His Spirit so that we will be able. We still have a model for the kind of people we should be and that model is Jesus; what we see in Him, we should be that kind of person. Be open to Jesus and the Spirit, to be guided, be strengthened, be given courage.

Go "*Go to...*" (*Matthew 10:6f*) They are to go on a short-term mission programme that will take them into the towns and villages; they are to do the same kinds of things that Jesus was doing, preaching, teaching, healing and they were given all kinds of instructions about the way in which they were to do this. They were to go trusting that God would help them and they were to go expecting God to work through them. Was this the first time they had done this? They had watched Jesus, but that's always easier! Was this the first time doing this on their own? They were away outside their comfort zone! We pray that God will help our community to flourish – might His answer to that prayer be "What are you going to do to make your community flourish?" Mentoring children at school; being involved in the community council and its campaigns for the good of the community; caring for a neighbour who is struggling with life, befriending someone who is lonely and frail; inviting someone to come to church with you, bringing them with you rather than expecting them to come on their own; telling someone about your faith in Jesus and what that means so that they might begin their own journey to faith; supporting you family, children, grand-children. All of these are answers to "what does it mean to "Go"?" For some, going is about becoming a preacher, going half-way across the world, or going to some far-flung part of Scotland and we need to pray that God will raise up people who will do that too. For most of us, to "go" will mean something of the picture we have

painted of the part we play in our community, being involved, bringing the compassion of Jesus to bear on a harassed and helpless world.

Where is your comfort zone? Did all of this take the disciples out of their comfort zone? Were they happy watching Jesus, supporting Him? Were they happy being witnesses of His compassion and power? "But don't ask me to...!" We can imagine them making objections, trying to wriggle out of these challenges – if you can find it, the very funny Adrian Plass has a piece about the disciples making objections to the call and the instructions - but in the end Jesus has said "go" and they go and they discover that God is at work through them in the towns and villages as He had been at work through Jesus in the towns and villages. What do we see in the communities where we live? How do we react to what we see? Do we pray for our communities? Will we be open to receive courage and strength from the Spirit? In the end, will we go, to be involved, to show people what Jesus is like, to share love and faith and hope with people who are harassed and helpless? Is this outside your comfort zone? You are not the first, and you won't be the last; and God works through all of us.