



Sermon

18th June 2023

Pray for Labourers in the Harvest

Matthew 9:35-10:8

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Our gospel passage starts with Jesus going “through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and illness.”

When Helen and I toured Israel in 2018, we visited an excavated village on the Eastern shore of Lake Galilee. It was Magdala where Mary Magdalen came from. And there was the excavated first century synagogue. Jesus would surely have visited this synagogue – he visited all the towns and villages of Galilee and this one is only 10km from his base at Capernaum. Excitingly, there is a large, carved stone in the synagogue which our archaeologist tour guide told us was a torah rest. The equivalent of a lectern, to rest the Torah scrolls in the services. If Jesus came there, preaching and teaching, he would have sat somewhere on those stone benches; he would have used that Torah stone when he spoke to the people!

Matthew has told us that Jesus went to all the villages teaching, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, healing the sick of every disease and sickness. He wrote the same thing almost exactly in 4:23 just before recording the Sermon on the Mount. The name of this literary device is an inclusio. It is like a heading and a conclusion. In between – that which is included - is the content described by the heading.

Within the inclusio, Matthew records the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ healings in Capernaum: the leper, the centurioed’s servant, Peter’s mother-in-law, many who were oppressed by demons, the sick all came to him and he healed them. He set the Gadarene demoniac free, stilled the storm, forgave and healed the paralysed man, healed the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, raised Jairus’ daughter from death, healed two blind men and delivered a mute man from a demon.

Is it fair for Matthew to say, “He proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom and healed the sick of every disease and sickness?” I think Matthew has given good evidence for that claim!

This is what Jesus’ ministry looked like. It was dynamic and impacting. That is what he launched the apostles into in our reading today.

Matthew called

Last week, we focused on the call of Abram and the call of Matthew. In each case, the God calling them changed their lives. Abram moved from Iraq to Canaan, left a city to be a nomad.

Matthew went from his lucrative tax business to the uncertainty of being the disciple of an itinerant rabbi. But he found life, purpose and a role in life he could never have imagined. Could he have conceived his name and his writing would be known and studied 2000 years later?

As we read chapter 10, we find that Matthew has been included in the twelve apostles. It seems that not much time has passed since he was called, but then Matthew tends to organise his story by themes rather than strict chronology so it may be more time has passed than we might imagine. Nevertheless, it would not have been very long – Jesus only ministered publicly for three years and this has still to be early in that period.

Harvest Fields

Jesus said to the disciples, “The harvest is plentiful.” What are our harvest fields? We each have our own of course: the people we are in contact with in life, family, friends, neighbours, colleagues. Then there are those

further afield – contacts in other parts of the country, other nations. But what about our harvest field as a local church? We have an obvious harvest field of the geographical parish which is the peninsula excluding Red Beach. But of course, practically, there is a greater reach than the legal boundaries. We have the harvest field of contacts we make as a church through the Op Shop, mainly music, Messy Church, Selwyn Centre. We have contact with people who walk in off the street. And God does send some people quite explicitly. I can think of three people who have reported to me that God clearly told them to get up and go to St Stephen's. Others may not have heard it so directly but have responded nonetheless. When they come, they may know the Lord already, they may be seeking. They are part of our mission field.

We have a mission relationship with several groups: broadly through the Anglican Missions Board which sponsors missions work on behalf of the Anglican Church of this province through other agencies and directly with Kailakuri hospital in Bangladesh, Firefly orphanage in Nepal, Mission Aviation in our interest in Jonathan Pound serving as a pilot in South Sudan but principally with Kondoia Diocese in Tanzania. In all these fields, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. This is not unusual! Jesus knew about it back in his day.

Sent out

Jesus told the disciples to pray for the God to send out labourers into the harvest. Sometimes when you pray for something – possibly in a distant way - that God should do something for those people over there – you find that he uses you to be the answer!

So it was with the disciples – Jesus commissioned them to go out and extend his ministry.

It is often difficult finding people to share the mission of the church. It seems to be even harder post-COVID. In all three of our weekly services, there is a need for more people to step forward to allow the smooth running of the services without always relying on the same few. Won't you think how you can help rather than passively receive?

To return to our gospel passage, Jesus commissioned the twelve and sent them out to do what he has been doing. It was very good training: first he demonstrated, then they were with him as he did it, then he sent them (not alone but in twos) out to try without him, and we learn later that they came back to report on their trips and he took them aside to be debriefed.

By the way, it was not just the twelve – Luke reports in his gospel that later Jesus sent out another peripheral group of 70 disciples on the same mission – this ministry is not limited to the Apostles. At his ascension, Jesus commissioned all his followers to do the things he had taught his disciples.

Kondoia Team

Last week in all the services, we started to pray for the team going to Kondoia in August: Helen, Toni Wentworth, Michael Ng and I from this parish and Peter Akester, Caroline and Anton Nikoloff from Rangiora. Our SOMA trips are directly based on this style of ministry which Jesus started here in Matthew 10. We go out proclaiming the Kingdom of God, praying for the sick, freeing people from demonic oppression. I can't say we have cleansed a leper or raised the dead – yet.

That was the commission Jesus gave to the apostles in verse 1 of chapter 10 and in verse 8. Now some of his instructions were general and some were particular to that time.

The instruction not to go to the gentiles or the Samaritans was probably because he was sent first to the Jews and to the world. If he had started to focus on gentiles, it would so have alienated him from the Jews that he would not have been able to reach them at all anymore. Later he did send the church out to reach out to gentiles.

Recently, Bishop Given emailed us about the proposed trip and the value he sees in our trips. He wrote:

We are so excited that we will be able to see you in August. I just finished a Zoom meeting of the Anglican Communion Steering Committee for Evangelism and Church Planting. We have declared to plant one million churches in the next ten years. I shared how we have been able to grow the church

here in Kondoia and one way is the Healing Ministry which some from New Zealanders have been helping us with. I shared this last year at the Lambeth Conference for evangelical bishops and Bishop Rich of London who is involved in church planting told us today, he is trying to apply the method in London and it has worked in an amazing way in establishing house churches planting. He told us last month they prayed for one person and got healed and through that healing ministry they have been able to establish a house church and around 15 to 20 people are attending services at that house. We praise God that even in these difficult days some are trusting the Lord through healing ministry.

The final instruction Jesus gave in this section was, "Freely you have received; freely give." Salvation and healing are free to us - at great cost to Jesus. We have no right to charge for that we have received for free. Our ministry is free to Kondoia – they are poor; we are comparatively rich. We as a parish pay our own way there. For us who go there is personal cost. Whether it be taking Michael taking annual leave, or the physical demands of back country, cross-cultural travel. It is not a joy ride although there is joy in seeing the Lord at work.

Pray!

Please do pray for our team going away in August. Pray for our health and wellbeing as we lead up to August. Pray for our practical and spiritual preparation. On the trip there can be emotional and spiritual trials. There is the need to respond to many people through the language barrier; there are long flights and tiredness. But the Lord has called and we are responding to that call.

Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out more labourers here on the Peninsula. We have sought to employ another children's minister to work beside Wendy for some time but not found anyone. There are many other voluntary roles which could be filled to make us more effective.

This Kondoia team is full now, but there are other teams, other SOMA missions. SOMA is back in business with four trips this year and more in the planning stage for next year. You heard how significant Bishop Given thinks this ministry is and how it should be extended more widely. Maybe you are being called to go on another trip next year!

Maybe – no surely! - you are called to reach out to your circle of influence here in Whangaparaoa.