**Luke 10:1-9, W & LBam 18/10/20.**

Over the years I’ve seen some strange attempts to motivate staff - but this really does take the biscuit! What is Jesus thinking of? Had he not been to any Management Training Sessions? Was there no Management Consultant to advise him? What a strange way to get his followers enthusiastic and excited.

Jesus has a huge task that he wants his followers to work on. So he says… “The harvest plentiful. But the labourers are few.” That’s a pretty dispiriting start, isn’t it? Not too motivational?

But then, he compounds the problem: “Go on your way! See I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.” Now, I remember once on a scout hike seeing a dead sheep that had been attacked by a dog and it wasn’t a pretty sight…And Jesus, as he prepares to send out his followers, uses that as a metaphor for what is likely to happen to them.

But despite all this bad news, they are still prepared to go, well at least they can take some protection with them…“Ah, no,” says Jesus. “That’s the other thing I need to tell you…”

“Carry no purse no bag no sandals…”

Put yourself in their shoes, it doesn’t sound very inviting, does it? The task is massive. They are likely to get ravaged by the wolves. And they can’t take anything with them to aid them on their way.

Welcome to Christian mission

A great theologian called Emil Brunner once said: “The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning.” Just as it is impossible to differentiate between fire and burning, so it should be impossible to differentiate between Church and Mission.

Mission is not something the Church does. Mission is what the Church is, or should be.

What we can learn from this passage about the nature of Mission. There are 3 things I want to draw out of what heard today:

1. The call to mission

Now this is an interesting passage because some versions say that there were 70 chosen by Jesus to go out, as the one we heard does. Others say that there were 72. The Greek, as it often is, is a little ambiguous. But without going into all the grammatical arguments, my belief is that Jesus sent out 70, not 72 and that it is actually quite an important detail, for two reasons:

Firstly, it reminds us of the story of Moses in the wilderness in Numbers 11. Moses was feeling overworked and overtired, the Israelites were looking for him to do everything: lead the worship, make the decisions, all the pastoral care and so on, in verse 14, Moses complains to God. He says…“They keep whining…I can’t be responsible for all these people by myself. It’s too much for me!” So in verse 16 God said to Moses, “Assemble 70 elders who are recognised as leaders of the people…Then they can help you to bear the responsibility.”

Secondly, the number 70 is important because at the time it was thought to be the number of nations in the world. So perhaps, symbolically, what Jesus is saying here is that all the nations of the world are to be involved in Christian mission.

We may feel nervous about going out to tell others about the love of God, we may feel that we don’t have the right gifts or abilities – which, of course, is exactly how Moses felt.

In Exodus 4: 10 -12, he said to God, “Lord, don’t send me. I have never been a good speaker. I am a poor speaker, slow and hesitant.”

And what does God reply? “Who gives man his mouth? It is I, the Lord. Now go, I will help you to speak, and I will tell you what to say.”

And that is the promise of God to us too, that if we are willing to go out and tell people about his love then God will give us the words and enable us to speak for him.

I once heard a description of church - not from someone here, I hasten to add! - but someone who was feeling pretty exhausted in their own church because it was the same people always doing the work whilst others sat back and let them get on with it.

She said, “You know my church is like going to a football match. There are 22 people running around, exhausted and desperately in need of a rest being cheered on by a big crowd of people who desperately need some exercise!

2. The responsibility of mission

Mission is a huge responsibility for us to carry.

That’s why, in verse 4, Jesus says to the 70: “greet no one on the road”. Not because he was encouraging them to be rude but because, in Middle Eastern, African and Asian countries, a greeting can take a very long time.

There is a really important verse in this passage, verse 7: “Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide.” Now this may seem very straight-forward to us but, actually it was a major ask for those Jesus called.

The followers whom Jesus was commissioning were Jews and, of course, they would only have eaten ritually clean food. But they were being sent to an area where many Gentiles lived so if they accepted hospitality from the Gentiles, they would have to eat ritually unclean food.

So what I think Jesus is saying here is that, if they were to be successful in mission, they had to leave their religiosity behind them: immerse themselves in the local culture and be prepared to set aside some of the ways they had been taught so that there would be no barriers to others receiving Christ.

3. The activity of mission

What does mission actually involve? This is an interesting passage because Jesus exhorts his followers to say, “The Kingdom of God has come near to you”.

When we look at the world around us, when we see the pain and suffering of so many and the injustice that seems to flourish both here and abroad, we might reasonably ask…“Has the Kingdom of God really come near?”

But Jesus points to other signs that prove the Kingdom of God is near, two from this passage I’d like to draw your attention to.

The sharing of hospitality, remember verse 7: Graciously receiving is as important as graciously giving.

During my time working in Tajikistan, I was invited to an orphanage and we had lunch there after the meetings. The meal was Plov, the local speciality, some vegetables, rice and mutton all stewed together in oil. This is eaten with the fingers and the test of a good Plov is if the oil runs down to the elbow

I admit it was difficult to show my enjoyment of it, but if I had not that would have been such an insult because their hospitality was so important to , and for them this was something special.

Also compassion and care is a sign of the nearness of the Kingdom, verse 9: Jesus says, “Cure the sick who are there”. Caring for the sick and the dying, the sad and the lonely, the hurt and the anxious… these are all signs of the nearness of the Kingdom of God, coming to others through them and us, all part of our mission.

So, this fascinating passage has much to tell us about mission:

I mentioned earlier Brunner’s idea that, “The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning”. Our aim and our prayer must surely be that here at St Mary’s & St. Peter’s we are known as a missionary people; not just because of what we do but because of who we are… Amen.