

On Tuesday evening, Rob Harrison came to speak about his latest book – The Scruffy Disciple¹. For the most part he spoke about his desire to more fully understand what it meant to be Jewish in the first century. So much of our understanding of who Jesus is, and even his context is understood with Christian or even Greek assumptions – rather than of what it meant to be a young Jewish man in a rural society. It was a very interesting presentation.

Rob has used these insights to help explore what it might mean for someone to seek to be a disciple of Jesus – like those men who are sent out in our Gospel reading today.

Rob reminded us that for fishermen like Peter, his brothers and cousins - the only options for their future was to continue in the family business. Trades were handed down father to son. One of the only ways out of this circle and traditional life was to become a rabbi or a disciple. In other words, to become one who teaches or encourages others in the faith.

This is not as we might see ministry from a Church perspective – it was not a setting aside in modern Christian sense – rather it was a sitting at the feet of a teacher – learning to argue – learning to talk and to listen – and then having the courage to leave your family and your village.

On Tuesday evening this led to an interesting chuckle. At this time of history – education and learning – involved debate. A sermon like I am presenting now would be unheard of! Rather I might present an idea, and others would counter that idea and so on, while we come to the heart of what we think a piece of scripture might mean. In many ways I think we have lost something in this. Education was about debate – no certainty of truth. For a time in history which is supposedly post enlightenment and postmodern, we rarely encourage debate of ideas openly. Rather we present hopefully coherent arguments for reflection, and often claim anything that challenges our position is fake!

So in this context, the rabbi or teacher – in today's story Jesus; draws unto himself disciples – a small number because otherwise teaching and debate are difficult and ineffective; then once that group had grown they might move out to teach others.

What is interesting in Luke's account however is that it is not a small number – 70 disciples is a far greater number than most Rabbi's or prophet's would have at a given time. Now this may be an indicator from Luke that Jesus was more than a Rabbi, and clue to the fact that he was the Messiah. It may also be that Luke has a different agenda given his own learning and education.

¹ <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Scruffy-Disciple-loves-disciple-Jesus-ebook/dp/B07JH2GYWS>

So in Luke's account Jesus calls 70 disciples to be confident to go out in to all the regions and share what they have learnt about God from Jesus. Jesus asks them to be visible in their community – visible in their country to share what God has evoked in them.

When Jesus sends out the 70 he sends them in pairs – Mission is not a task to be undertaken alone, but with support. Jesus tells them to travel lightly – not to go out with things which will burden you – but to sit lightly to the task which is ahead. In many ways this also reflects this rural tradition and context of travel and hospitality.

When the 70 return after their missionary journey they report to Jesus about their experiences. Some have found great welcome and others have been ignored – or worse! But Jesus says to them – look whatever the outcome rejoice! – not in your own success or failure – but in all that God has achieved through you.

What I find most interesting however in this account of the sending out the 70 is that Jesus goes on to instruct them in the dynamic of sharing peace: “if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you” (verse 6). This verse is packed with instruction for reactive lives today and is worth taking time to unpack. First, Jesus assumes that these apostles he sends, do in fact have peace. Jesus says that “Your peace” specifically, not just random, generic peace, will rest on others or return to you.

As we engage others, we must first be well-grounded in God's peace, the peace that passes understanding. God's shalom is more than being calm. It is confidence in God's abiding presence so that we also share that presence with others. Engaging others means not treating them as objects upon which we act, but as sacred others with whom we are called to be fully and peacefully present. If they do not share this peace, Jesus does not advise reactivity or scorn. Instead, he reassures his followers that their peace is not diminished and cannot be taken away from them: “it will return to you” (verse 6)².

This is a very powerful instruction – we are called to ‘be with’ – and in this *being with* we take with us the peace of God that is beyond our knowledge which we have nurtured in ourselves before we step out!

I have been reading over the last week or two a book by Sam Wells, who is the vicar of St Martin's in the fields³. He describes *being with* slightly differently to Luke. Wells uses “being with” as the touchstone for our discipleship, through presence, attention, acknowledging mystery, and openness to delight, enjoyment, and glory,

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4104

³ Incarnational Mission: Being with the world by Sam Wells

and working in partnership. But in my reading the essence is the same – we are given the peace from God, which must be nurtured in ourselves – which allows us to then be with others in new and transformational ways.

So in Luke's account Jesus calls 70 disciples to be confident to go out in to all the regions and share what they have learnt in God from Jesus. This will take not only confidence but a great deal of courage. Jesus asks them to be visible in their community –to share what God has evoked in them– and we are asked to do the same thing. To be visible as a church and as individuals in Queens Park - Like the 70 this will mean nurturing God's peace with in us that we might take it and share it with others.

The reading we heard from the letter to the Galatians from Paul builds on this. *Do not be deceived*, Paul writes – *God will not be mocked*. God is a God of love and compassion – but there is work to be done and we cannot ignore the responsibility which faith in God offers. Don't pretend to offer peace if you do not nurture it within yourself.

Last Sunday I mentioned that in the coming weeks – and particularly next Sunday we are going to celebrate what we have achieved in our current Mission Strategy. You may remember that we are seeking to be **Confident, Compassionate and Creative in sharing the Gospel of Christ in this city**. As we come to celebrate our patronal festival next Sunday, I am inviting each of us to offer a thanksgiving or a prayer under each of these headings. A celebration of where God shared with us in confidence, love and compassion. Where have we taken and not been deceived? Where have we taken the peace of Christ? Where have we experienced this peace returned to us?

Today's readings are both stories of encouragement that God gives us what we need to fulfil these things; but also of challenge that we should not mock God by not making the most of this giftedness or working to transform the world. I hope each of you will take time to record a thought or a story which we might share in our worship next Sunday.

When we started our mission action plan 6 years ago I shared a poem of St. Teresa of Avila, who was a Spanish mystic born in the early 16th Century. She was a Carmelite nun and well respected theologian. She wrote many resources to support meditation and prayer. One of her well-known sayings, reminds us that now we carry on the ministry that Jesus gave us, just as the 70 did;; and this week we are invited to reflect where we have experienced and seen this in practice:

*Christ has no body on earth but yours;
no hands but yours; no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ
looks out to the world.
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless others now.*

Amen.