

Mission Matters – Matthew 10:1-20 (+ Matt 28:16-20)
8th August 2010 @ 10.30am

Introduction

Good morning everyone

Two weeks ago we were looking at the last four verses of Matthew chapter 9 and at the end of it I asked you to do two things for me.

If you were here, do you remember what they were?

Firstly, I asked you to keep your eyes open in order to see the harvest possibilities that are all around you

Did you see the harvest out there in Lewes?

Did you feel people's pain?

Did you get their sense of lostness?

Did you see them as sheep without a shepherd?

Did you feel something of the *splanchna* that Jesus feels – that gut-wrenching compassion that so moved him as he saw the Galilean crowds

Secondly, I asked you to pray every day, for God to send out workers into his Lewes harvest field.

Did you manage it?

Today we're moving onto chapter 10. We'll be looking at how, having first asked his close followers to pray for mission workers, Jesus now sends out them out to actually be those mission workers! The truth is, that vital as it is, prayer is not enough all by itself.

This is an immensely practical passage, so please be ready to forgive me for some of my bluntness!

We'll be focussing on three specific things:

Firstly, we'll see how Jesus selected his very first mission team

Secondly, we'll see how Jesus gives this team a clear task to do

And thirdly, we'll see how the mission team weren't required to face their tough times in mission without support

Got that? Team selection, the task that needs to be done, and how there's help available in the tough times of mission

Team (vv1-4)

So let's start by looking at the team that Jesus assembled to do this, the first ever mission.

The first thing to note is who Jesus didn't pick.

He didn't pick the religious professionals

He didn't pick the intelligentsia of the day

He didn't pick people with political power or special skills

In fact there's no evidence that those he picked were all gifted in evangelism. Rather the reverse!

No! Instead Jesus picked a moderately diverse group of people, who had something significant in common, apart from the fact they were all men: they were wholly inadequate for the task that lay ahead!

The apostles didn't lead the church in turning the world upside down because they were extraordinarily talented or naturally gifted
They managed this because – in spite of their human limitations and failures – they surrendered themselves to God, whose *“power is made perfect in [our] weakness”* (1 Cor 12:9)

This should be a tremendous encouragement for us:
When we're tempted to become discouraged and disheartened
When our spiritual life and witness suffer because of our sins and failures
We should remember Jesus' choice and use of his apostles, and thank God for the greatness of his grace

But it also means that we have no excuse for avoiding mission work
Notice that all the apostles went on the mission – not just some of them
Although they weren't all evangelists by temperament, they were all sent to do the work of one!

Do you see the pattern here?
Jesus' mission becomes his disciples' mission
His disciples' mission becomes our mission – since we're also his disciples

A Sunday school teacher asked her little children, as they were on the way to a church service, "And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" One bright little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping."

Under Jesus' sending authority, every Christian has a responsibility for mission work
We're called to be activists in the field, rather than simply relax in our pews

For some of us mission work may be limited to praying, perhaps because of some incapacity – but that won't be true for very many
For a few, like Christine Angel, and John and Fritha Washington, it will involve working in mission fields overseas
But for most of us, mission work will mean working out there, in the harvest fields of Lewes

Every person here this morning has a part to play in mission
Not everyone may be a frontline harvester but everyone can do something

Even if you can't walk, or stand, or speak to people, you can still help
By making food
Or putting leaflets into envelopes,
Or folding service sheets,
Or making a phone call,

Or writing a letter of encouragement,
Or joining a prayer team

There's always something a person can do.

So, how are you currently serving as a member of Southover?

What mission- type work are you personally currently involved in?

Could it be more?

Should it be more?

Are you willing to be involved with the third morning service?

What about committing financially or practically to our 'fresh expression' project in the centre of Lewes?

If you're short of ideas, have a look at that note on *Serving and Belonging* in today's notice sheet

I defy anyone not to be able to find some new way of helping with that list of items to go on!

If nothing else, you could always increase your giving!

Of course at Southover we're already doing many harvesting activities:

Through our Alpha courses

Through Lunch Bunch

Through women's trips to the theatre

Through Lewes Sings Gospel

Through Men's Breakfasts

Through our work in Rwanda

Through the Holiday Club

Through the Pells Pool sessions

All these are opportunities to support mission work and many people are already involved.

But is this really sufficient with a church family of over 300 adults?

Now I don't want this to become another guilt trip from the pulpit!

If you're genuinely already doing all that you can and all that God's calling you to do – relax secure in that knowledge and don't feel that you need anything more.

But the bottom line is this:

As Jesus' disciples we've all been commanded to fulfil and be a part of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)

The goal of the Christian faith isn't simply to enlighten our souls

We're saved to serve, and a major expression of that service is mission work.

So my challenge to us this morning is this: are we all prepared to serve in our Lord's mission team? And if we are, in what ways will we do it? *[Repeat]*

Task (vv 5-16)

So we've seen how Jesus chose his team.

Now what about the task that they're to do for him?
How does Jesus commission the disciples for the work ahead?
And more importantly what can we learn from his instructions to them?

Although it's obvious that some of the details of this commissioning are specific to that first mission, it's also clear that much of what Jesus says does translate straightforwardly into principles for mission that we can apply today, here in Lewes.

I've picked out four of them for us to learn from

Firstly, in verses 5 and 6, Jesus tells his disciples where to go and where not to go

We should note that Jesus set clear limited objectives. In view of the extreme urgency and the plentifulness of the harvest, he told his disciples to go only *"to the lost sheep of Israel"* (v6).

In a similar way, we here at Southover must also carefully focus our efforts:
We need clear aims for our church mission strategy: no church or ministry can be all things to all people.

So, as we're located here, we need to be focussing on the 14,000 lost people of Lewes (v6).
We need to be focussing on our friends and family who don't yet know Jesus.
We need to be focussing on those we work with, our neighbours, the people who serve us, the people who interact with us most

So, Key Mission Principle No. 1 for us here at Southover is this: we should be primarily focussing our efforts on our mission field here in Lewes

Secondly, in verse 7, Jesus tells his disciples what to say: *"As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'"*

Mission always centres round Jesus. Mission is Jesus-shaped.
When we preach that the kingdom of heaven is near, what we really mean is that Jesus is near: the kingdom has arrived in the person of Jesus
The central theme of the kingdom is the King. It's all about Jesus.

In verse 32 Jesus says: *"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."*

Jesus' authorisation commissions us

Jesus' example directs us

Jesus' name determines our acceptance or rejection by those we seek to serve

If our mission doesn't embody something of Jesus' life, and if it doesn't point people in repentance and faith to him, it will fail

It's as simple as that

So, Key Mission Principle No. 2 for us is this: we talk about Jesus wherever we go

Thirdly, in verses 11 to 13, Jesus tells his disciples to look for receptive people. He tells them to go first to those who are open to the gospel message.

Now we need to realise that when Jesus says “*search for some worthy person*” in verse 11 and when he says “*if the home is deserving*” in verse 13, it doesn’t mean that the disciples are to decide who can receive the gospel and who cannot.

The idea is simply for the disciples to associate with people of good repute in order to gain the best possible hearing for their message

Of course this is directly applicable to our search for suitable premises for Cafélife. We need to find the best possible place in the centre of Lewes from which to operate, in order for us to gain the best possible hearing for our gospel message

So, Key Mission Principle No. 3 for us is this: we must first look for people who are receptive to the gospel

Fourthly, in verses 13 to 15, Jesus tells his disciples to move on if the gospel and the messenger are rejected

This is undoubtedly the most uncomfortable of all the principles.

The prophetic gesture of shaking “*the dust off [ones] feet*” was a serious sign of judgment. It publically declared the household’s rejection of the gospel and so God’s rejection of them in turn (10:14).

What’s the application for us at Southover?

Well, firstly, it’s really important that when we’re doing mission work, we see all people as equally worthy of the gospel. Everyone has a right to hear the gospel message clearly stated.

What changes things is how people respond to that message!

Secondly, we mustn’t forget that the gospel is naturally divisive, as Jesus himself reminded us. So there’s almost bound to be opposition:

“But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23)

Both opposition and rejection is to be expected

But thirdly, a lack of response mustn’t dampen our own enthusiasm to find suitable ground for planting the gospel.

What we do need to realise is that continually harvesting the same ground can be futile and ineffective

For example, if we’ve been bringing along the same man to the WHMB for 10 years and nothing’s happened spiritually – shouldn’t we be thinking about inviting someone else?

So, Key Mission Principle No. 4 for us is this: we must be prepared to move on to fresh ground if and when the gospel and we, as messengers of it, are rejected (10:13b-15)

Tough times (vv17-20)

So we've seen that Jesus wants everyone in his mission team
We've also seen the principles that we can apply to task of mission
Now let's look at how Jesus provides for his team in the tough times of mission

A young 19th century American missionary Adoniram Judson fell in love with a godly young woman by the name of Ann. Imagine being Ann's father when he received this letter from Judson:

"I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next Spring, to see her no more in this world;

Whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life;

Whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death?"

Yes, if we're to commit ourselves to being workers for the harvest, there'll certainly be tough times ahead for us, even if we're to focus only on Lewes. We may not face the extreme challenges that Judson offered his wife, but it won't be easy wherever we serve.

But actually I want you to be encouraged by what I'm going to say here!
Because it's when the tough times come in mission that we realise that we're not alone
It's when the tough times are with us that we realise that we've got the Holy Spirit alongside us, working with us and supporting us

Acts 1:8 says this: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Jesus tells us that we'll receive power from on high, because we're partners of his in this mission

As our partner he'll change hearts and give true life to people.

Since we're co-labourers with him, we don't have to have everything worked out before we do anything.

Remember we'll have the Holy Spirit with us as our personal helper

He's the other person in the trinity that empowers us as believers to carry out the mission of Christ: which is to bind up the broken-hearted and to set the captives free.

Don't ever forget that it doesn't all depend on us: it's his harvest, not ours

We're not the lords of the harvest: he is

We're not responsible for the growth of the kingdom: he is.

But he does seek our cooperation:

He wants us to pray.

And he wants us to go.

He wants us to answer our own prayers and like Isaiah to say, *"Here am I. Send me!"* (Isaiah 6:8)

When we do go we can expect God to work through us in spite of our inadequacies (v8)
When we do go we don't do it to get rich but we can expect that we'll have enough (v9-10)
When we do go we can be confident that the Spirit of God will be speaking through us (v20).
Already some of those who've gone to Rwanda have found that they've been asked to speak
in front of large numbers of people with little or no chance for preparation...
And they've been able to do it in style!

When we do go we must expect there to be opposition (v17-18). To be honest if there isn't
any opposition perhaps it indicates that we're not saying anything worth opposing!

Finally, when we do go we know that we're doing it under the authority of Jesus, we're
doing in the power of the Holy Spirit, and we're doing it for the glory of the Father.

Conclusion

So let's recap

Like two weeks ago, there's really nothing complicated about this passage: it's simply about
how Jesus sends out his close followers to do mission work.

The issue is not about whether we understand the passage; the issue is about how we're
going to respond to it!

So like last time I want you to do something for me. Three things actually!
Again they're not difficult. But again they'll need a small commitment from you

Firstly, I'd like you to review how you personally are contributing to the mission of the
church at Southover.

What do you currently do? Write it down and then pray about it.

Secondly, I'd like you to prayerfully ask yourself how you should be contributing in future.

What is it that God is laying on your heart to do while you're a member of Southover?

Pray about it and then write it down.

Remember it might be that you're already doing all you need – but do please check to make
sure that's really the case.

Thirdly, when you've done that, bring what you've written with you and come and speak to
Steve, or David, or me, and tell us your thoughts.

A few weeks back when he was preaching on 1 Corinthians 3:13, David made it clear that
one day our contribution to his mission will be judged by God.

What will God say to us on that day?

Will it be: *"Well done good and faithful servant!"*? (Matt 25:23)

Or will it be something else, perhaps not quite as positive?

Prayer