

Pentecost 2A 2020

Gen 18.1-15

Ps 16.1-2, 11-18

Ro 5.1-11

Mt 9.35-10.8

One of the expressions we hear these days is 'post COVID' or 'post COVID 19' referring to that time after the COVID-19 pandemic, or after the restrictions associated with COVID-19 are lifted.

Another expression we don't hear quite so much, but which is equally applicable these days is 'post Pentecost'. To be honest, I made that one up. But we are living post Pentecost; that is, we are living after the events of the particular Pentecost day that is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. In other words, we are living after the giving of the Holy Spirit, the commissioning and empowering of followers of Jesus to continue Jesus' mission. We are living in the light of the Holy Spirit, with the presence, strength, leading, teaching, and guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit operating in the life of the church today both in individual Christians and corporately in the church.

Today's reading from Matthew 9 talks about Jesus' ministry and Jesus commissioning his twelve disciples to share his ministry. This particular commissioning happened before Jesus death and resurrection and is a forerunner of the ultimate commissioning which is still ours today. This commissioning relates in effect to a mission trip the disciples were sent on by Jesus as part of their training as disciples.

The passage today from Matthew 9 verse 35 to chapter 10 verse 8 is very important so I have included the text.

*"Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'*

*Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.*

*These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.'*

One of the important things that we hear about in this passage is called in Matthew's gospel the 'kingdom of heaven', or in Mark and Luke's gospel 'the kingdom of God'. Same thing just different names.

In the first part of today's reading we have in verse 35 - 'then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness'. Then a little later in the passage, Jesus, in response to the great need that he sees which is spoken of in verses 36-38, commissions the twelve disciples to go out, and the words of commission include 'as you go, proclaim the good news, the kingdom of heaven has come near'.

So, Jesus was proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and the disciples were to proclaim the good news, the kingdom of heaven has come near. The disciples were to do what Jesus was doing.

The idea, the concept of the kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God, was well known to the Jewish people of Jesus' time. They were looking forward to the state of affairs known as the kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God, where the promises of God to the people of Israel would be fulfilled, where the world would be put to rights, and where to quote the Lord's prayer, God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus himself said that the point of his mission was to proclaim that this time was near (Luke 4.43).

The reality of the kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God had a number of facets. We see part of that in today's reading. Immediately after his words of commission to the disciples Jesus said to them - cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. The proclamation that the kingdom of God was close wasn't just about words.

The coming kingdom of God had real effects on people's physical lives. We can see from Jesus' actions and what he commissioned the disciples to do, that when the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven comes there will be no sickness; there will be no death; evil and the forces of evil which hold down and diminish people's lives will be no more.

Part of the state of things called the kingdom of God is also reconciliation between God and humanity through Jesus Christ. The second reading set down for today from Romans 5 verses 1-11 makes that very clear. You might like to have a read of that important passage.

“The kingdom of God when it comes will also include all of creation not just the human part. There will be new creation for all of creation when the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God comes” (Romans 8.22-23).

The point of saying all this is that post Pentecost, all who are baptised, who call themselves followers of Jesus, Christians, disciples of Jesus, whatever description we use, have a vocation, a call on their life, a purpose if you like, and that purpose is to share in the mission of Jesus which is to announce the coming of the kingdom of God, and point to the coming kingdom by our actions. To tell and very importantly show at least something of what our world will be like when the kingdom comes, in order that the world will be a better place-more like heaven on earth, and also invite other people to get on board with the vision.

In the last week or so we have seen a lot of people catch the vision and get on board with the very important *black lives matter* movement. They want to make a difference. They want to see change. They want to get others on board too.

We want to do something similar with the mission of Jesus. We want to help people catch the vision, Gods’ vision, for the future of the world, called in the New Testament kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God, to get on board with that vision and make things better-more like heaven on earth.

Sometimes people think that Christianity is about what you believe, and to some degree what you believe is fundamental because we what we believe to be true really guides our actions and activities. But Christianity is not something that sits in our heads. To be a follower of Jesus means actions. Following Jesus means doing all we can to bring healing to those who are sick, inclusion for the excluded, freedom for those who are held back and diminished, equality for the marginalised, renewal for the creation, reconciliation with God for all who are far away.

The kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God is God’s vision for the future of the world, and it is an incredibly positive vision. Who wouldn’t want to be part of it? The kingdom of God is near and will come. It’s a certainty. When, we don’t know, but that this future will become reality is absolutely certain - Jesus’ resurrection is the guarantee.

There is no doubt that what drove Jesus was obedience to the Father, but we saw in the reading for today Jesus' heart. Do you remember, quite early in the reading, Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless like a sheep without a shepherd. Then Jesus commissioned the disciples and sent them out because he had compassion.

An important question for us all to consider post Pentecost is this: are we on board with this move of God? Are we on board with the vision of the kingdom of God, God's plan for the world? If not, why not? This vision is so compelling and positive, and we can be a part of it. Join in. We can join the movement that is international, multicultural, and multigenerational. The movement that is called Christianity. Decide to join. Decide to act. Decide to follow-Jesus.

People who have decided to join down the centuries have changed the world for the better - and we can too.

"When he saw the crowds, Jesus had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to the disciples, The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest." (Mt 9.36-37)

We can be those labourers; called by Jesus; sent into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit.