

Sermon 18.06.2017

Focus Scripture: Matthew 9: 35 – 10 : 23

It often struck me, as I travelled around both here and other European countries ,not to mention the Wise Isles from which a number of us hail; the considerable number of closed and neglected church buildings, +the number of church building put to alternative use. It struck me that these buildings once were filled with praying and interceding people.

Even in Holy Catholic Ireland, attendance at worship has significantly dropped, especially with the younger generation. Many reasons can be proffered for this decline, which may hold a modicum of truth, but our passage from Matthew may hold the real reason **and** possess the true solution.

The truly spiritual lively authority and power imparted by the Holy Spirit of Jesus on us is always in need of renewal + revitalisation of every generation of believers; for God has only children, no grandchildren.

Only when the Spirit of God is alive and vibrant to our lives and living, can we make Him real and consequential in lives who consider Him of no consequence. Now it is we who are His disciples.

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.

Our gospel reading starts at the tail end of chapter 9, and with Chapter 10 we enter a new and distinct phase in Jesus' ministry. For this reason it is important to quickly set this change of gear in some context.

When Jesus is baptised in Ch.3 he is approximately 30 years of age. 30 years is a long preparatory time for what will be an intense 3 year public ministry. The ratio is 10:1.

We know very little of His life before being publicly called out by the Baptist:

"Behold the Lamb of God ,who takes away the sin of the world."

The 30 year old man, Jesus, had served a long spiritual apprenticeship under God, His Father . Now His hour had come to go public with His campaign to destroy the powers of darkness; as His beloved disciple wrote:

"This is why the Son of God was revealed, to destroy the works of the devil."

In baptism, 3 things happen Jesus.

1. The Heavens opened over Him ... Now we live under an open heaven.

2. God, the Father invests Jesus with authority...

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well please."

3. With the descent and the resting of the Holy Spirit on Him, Jesus received power/dynamis to back-up that authority.

The eternal apprenticeship of Yeshua the Messiah was over. ...

And with the long wait over; Jesus, with the authority of God **and** in the anointing power of the Holy Spirit, entered the wilderness to commence battle with the satan on his home turf.

In Ch5-7 Speaking through sermons, parables, discussions, debates and conversations, Jesus realigns the ethical teaching of Judaism.

People hear beatitudes. They hear about being salt and light. They hear that laws of God have an interior as well as exterior dimension.

New insights shed light into anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, loving enemies, giving to the needy, praying, fasting, storing treasure in heaven, stop judging others, know people by their works.

Jesus condensed all essential Judaic law into the simple phrase..Love God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself.

+The gospel records the peoples reaction:

The crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes."

Jesus was meeting their needs.

By ch. 8+ 9 Jesus, sharply shifts up a gear and now backs up His words of truth with validating action...demonstrating that;

'the gates of hell shall not/could not prevail (hold out) against' Him.

With words of power and authority, He further invades the demonic domains of torment + disease. Jesus serves them their eviction notice.

With words of power and authority Jesus; calms storms, heals folk possessed of demons, heals a paralytic, restores a girl to life, a woman is healed by touching his garment. He heals the blind, the lepers. Gives speech to the dumb, +food to multitudes.

+He forgives sin; the primeval source of death.

The battle cry; *"the Kingdom of heaven is at hand."* was heard and people saw it manifested *"in signs and wonders."*

Unwittingly, our disciples had enrolled in an intensive, roller-coaster induction course called Activity Based Learning.

When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus, has a heart for the ordinary, the rudderless and the marginalised. It was arid religiosity and spiritual obstructionism that rose His ire, igniting legitimate forceful anger and language. He was not politically correct.

The nature of compassion is that it always sees the circumstance and need.

Without spiritual leadership we wander off, and get lost. A lost sheep is clueless...it stays where it is. For that reason the shepherd must seek them out; find where they are at and bring them home. This is also our task, for Prague is full of places where the lost can be found.

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."

This is being said also to us, as we are now the disciples.

But despite His love, compassion and power, Jesus was still one person...confined by time, space and location.

He set up his own Proclaiming Network, comprised of representatives who served under Him, saw what He did, heard what He said, day in... day out.

From the disciples He selected 12 to be apostles...'ones to be sent away'. These disciples had been with Jesus from the beginning ... serving their 'hands on' apprenticeships so as to become proclaimers of the Good News first, to the people of Galilee and after Pentecost , to the whole world.

Christ's instruction to the 12 are precise and revealing. The motto appears to be: Start as we mean to go on.

1. You received without payment; give without payment.

This instruction places the apostles in the rabbinic tradition. It gave honour and respect to what the apostles proclaimed. For a rabbi/teacher was bound by law to give his teaching freely; he was forbidden to take money for teaching The Torah which Moses had freely received from God. *"As God taught Moses gratis—so do you."*

2. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts/girdle,

The girdle, which the Jew wore round his waist, was rather broad; and at each end for part of its length it was double; money was carried in the double part of the girdle. The apostles would be seen not to have money or the appearance of money... again freely received, freely given.

3. (Take)"no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff..."

The bag may be one of two things. It may be a bag like a haversack in which provisions were carried or it can mean a beggar's collecting bag. Wandering teachers took a collection in such a bag after addressing the crowd. The Talmud teaches: "No one is to go to the Temple Mount with staff, shoes, girdle of money, or dusty feet." A man on God's business must never give the impression that he is 'doing' business.

For a labourers deserve their food.

A rabbi/teacher might not accept payment, **but** it was considered a a privilege and an obligation to support him, especially if he was seen to be a man of God.

In seeking out **worthy household** was important, for nothing untoward must detract from the message.

Being now agents of Jesus the 12 were empowered to impart their peace/ 'shalom' to the household. Words, good and bad were seen to be active energies seeking fulfilment. Words of blessing were powerful for good....but could be withdrawn in the event of the receiver proving unworthy. Curses were dreaded.

The final task for Jesus, before sending the apostles off was to give an impartation.

As the Father+ Holy Spirit imparted authority and power on Jesus at His baptism...so Jesus now imparts the same on the apostles...as Jesus received so He gives. True for disciples then, true for disciples now.

"(He) gave them authority(to), proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near....' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.

We have no feedback on how the 12 fared.... but it must have been a great success...because soon after they came back, Jesus sends out 70 more disciples and of them we read:

The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' He said to them... See, I have given you authority... over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you..."

There is much more contained in today's gospel reading and hopefully I whetted your appetite to *'search the scriptures'* during the week.

In this generation it is we who are the Lord's apprentices. It is we who are indwelt by His Holy Spirit; and it is we, through faith, co-labour with Him so that through us He can be present to others. To be of loving service to God, we need constant renewal in faith, hope, love and prayer. Then our church adventure will take off as people through us encounter Him in Jesus.

We now are the disciples of Jesus and we must activate in ourselves all the power and authority He has imparted to His believing people.

There is work to be done. Our job description is daunting to us, but not to Him who indwells us through the faith we must grow in. Then

*Freely we received ...freely give
proclaim the good news, 'The Kingdom of heaven has come near...cure the sick, raise the dead,
cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."*