

SERMON – 27/9/26

Luke 10:1-11

Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Luke 10:2)

The choice of this morning's reading was not influenced by the fact that we are celebrating Harvest Thanksgiving here today but in God's providence it perhaps helps us to understand better something of what we are called to be about in the spiritual realm because we can envisage the parallels that exist in the physical world around us. Living as we do in a rural area we have less excuse than those who spend their lives in the concrete jungles of our towns and cities.

Although we may sometimes be delayed about our business by a slow moving farm vehicle laden with tatties squeezing its way past the parked cars on its way through the town or the combine harvester being moved from one field to another, I think all of us are able to recognise the importance of the harvest in our lives. Most of us may find our food in the supermarket aisles but we know that a lot of what we buy does literally grow on trees and in the fields not only in our own country but across the world. We are already aware that changing weather patterns don't just affect our own daily business but have an impact on food production. What we may be slower to recognise is that a similar process is underway in the spiritual realm. In the well known parable of the sower, Jesus speaks about the seed of God's Word being planted, and its ability to grow and thrive and flourish and bear fruit being dependent on the soil in which it is sown and on the environment in which it is nurtured. In our reading this morning Jesus speaks about the restrictions placed on the harvest of the Spirit which is potentially incredibly plentiful by the lack of people available and willing to tend and to reap that harvest. Imagine watching crops simply rotting in the fields for lack of people to gather them in and you have a picture of what Jesus is talking about to His disciples (and indeed to us if we have ears to hear) in regard to His desire to see all people drawn to Him and set free to live life in all its fulness.

Over the last few weeks we have been learning to listen for God's leading of us as individuals and as a congregation. The specific questions I have raised from the front are these: How well do you and I know the voice of the Good Shepherd? Do we have ears to hear and the obedience of faith to follow where the Shepherd leads? Are people in our community or amongst our family and friends who have a sense of God tugging at their heart-strings aware that we are here to help them on their journey of faith? Are we being challenged to deepen our faith or to be led in new paths of service at this time?

Come with me into this morning's reading and continue to listen for what God may be saying to you personally at the moment. In the unfolding account of the Gospel, Jesus has turned His face towards Jerusalem and to what He must accomplish at Calvary. The pace of His ministry changes altogether – now there is an urgency to accomplish all that needs to be done in a short space of time. There is much ground to cover, many people to speak to, and so much is at stake. Christ knew that when His earthly ministry was completed the task of extending the Kingdom would be entrusted entirely to His disciples, albeit under the inspiration and empowerment of the Father's Gift, the Holy Spirit whom Jesus would pour out upon them. Previously it had been important to keep the Twelve close to Him so that they could be taught themselves and so that they could see Him at work. There was also a significant number of others not among the Twelve, men and women, who had stuck closely to Jesus during His wandering ministry in Galilee. They too were heading with Him to Jerusalem and they too would have a role to play after the resurrection. So here Jesus commissions 72 of them to go out in pairs ahead of Him to all the places He would pass through on His way to the city. Their task was to do as Jesus had done elsewhere – to heal the sick and proclaim the Good News of the nearness of the Kingdom of God. There was now not enough time for Jesus Himself to stop everywhere and speak to everyone who wanted to hear Him. There was a deadline now and so the task was more urgent than it had been thus far. Yet it was also vital, as it is today, that as many people as possible had the opportunity to respond to the Kingdom message.

So, as we read, Jesus was going to maximise the potential of this push towards His ultimate destination by casting a great net of fisherfolk to trawl with Him. Of course Jesus was there with them teaching and preaching as He went but I don't know if you noticed that although the Twelve had been called to *follow* Jesus, the 72 were actually sent *ahead* of Him at this point, like John the Baptist had been, to prepare the way for the Lord. And that is one thing that I have been challenged about in thinking about this passage over the past week – that although most of us are more comfortable being *followers*, sometimes even hiding in the coat tails of others, sometimes circumstances demand that we are *pioneers*, being sent like sheep among wolves into the big wide world, vulnerable and exposed, to be in some cases the first experience of Jesus that some people may ever have, through our sharing His message with our words and by reflecting His love in our lives.

The other thing that struck me this week was this parallel between what Jesus asks His followers to do and the process of harvesting. As He sends the 72 on ahead of Him, Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." If the harvest is ready to be gathered in then the harvesters are up against a deadline and it has to be all hands on deck to bring everything in on time. The same holds for our situation here in Kinross-shire. There are many, many folk around us in whose hearts the seed of the Gospel has been sown and in whom, by God's grace, little shoots of faith have sprung into life. There are generations of people who have heard the Good News as children at Sunday School or in the BBs or through Family Week or at SU groups but who have never been discipled into adulthood. There are many who have had an encounter with Christ during their lifetime but who have never taken that any further. For some, perhaps for many, all it might take is for one of us gently to share our own story of faith or graciously to extend an invitation to a friend or neighbour or family member to come along with us to church and find out more. The workers are few, Jesus says, but if we ask God, He will call those who are listening to join the harvesters. Christ had just 72 but that's where He started. There are more than 72 of us here this morning and that's where

we can start, asking the Lord of the harvest to send us out to work in the harvest field. There's an urgency. There's a deadline – the harvest won't wait for ever to be gathered in; it will get choked up with weeds and the potential that is there will wither away. Our approaches to folk don't have to be polished performances – we may well get tongue-tied even just offering a casual invitation to come to a service with us, but this is the Lord's work and it is He who will accomplish it if we will only respond to His call to play our part.

What will God do in our time? There is a plentiful harvest for God's Kingdom right on our doorstep. Let's begin by asking the Lord of the harvest to call us and others as workers, and let's be prepared to be surprised by what God will accomplish among us and through us.