

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2018  
The fields are white – seeing as Jesus sees.  
Luke 10.1-24

If we know our past history, and if we know where we should be going, then this will enable us to see where we are. On the spiritual front, Scotland was once in an awesome place. It was not all that long ago that Scotland was a major missionary sending nation, and the Church in South America, Africa and Asia owes much of its origins to this land. That is not how things are today. The Church of Scotland is estranged to the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland, and also to many parts of Africa. In a reversal of roles, Brazil and South Korea have sent missionaries to the UK!

In this passage, Jesus draws the attention of the Church to the subject of harvest. The Church in each generation is called to participate in the ministry of Christ, and harvest is what Christ is doing on the earth today. Let's examine Luke 10 and see what Jesus has to say to us.

At first reading, and I hope you do read this passage, and not just once, it seems like a nice story that Jesus is telling us. However, I hope that we will see that this is both a command, an invitation, a challenge and a great promise, all presented within these few verses. In comparison with times past our lives are very tame, this passage is Christianity at its best and most robust and noble!

The story is of the expanding mission of Jesus. He sends out the seventy two disciples who have gathered around Him. He sends them out two by two, always the safest way to go. Company provides encouragement, accountability and helps us keep on track. A long journey or a challenging task is often made easier if we have company. A walk in a strange place on a dark night is less frightening if there are two of us. There are two pairs of eyes, one to look ahead, and one behind, just in case something is lurking in the shadows or creeping up behind!

Jesus sends them out to do something and say something. He does not send any old person out, but followers, disciples. He sends them out to heal the sick, and say that the Kingdom of God is near. They are to go ahead of Jesus to the places He will visit, so these 72 are heralds of Christ's coming. They are sent to prepare the way for Jesus to meet the people.

All of that sounds fine. However, as we look at the details, things get a little bit more disconcerting! What preparations and provisions are they given? None. In fact, Jesus sends them out basically in the clothes they are wearing. No transport, no accommodation, no expense account is arranged, they are sent out as they are! This is not how we do things in the West. However, it is exactly how things have been done, and are still being done in many parts of the world where the Church is growing fast!

During The Bush War of 1988 in South Sudan, Bishop Nathaniel Garang, the Bishop of four Episcopal parishes, went missing. He was 'lost' for five years, and then appeared

again. What had he been doing? He had been walking around the country by foot. There were no cars or cycles that were not being stolen in the war. Despite the absence of resources and transport, no mobile phone, projector, Alpha or Christianity Explored Courses, money, or much else, Bishop Garang trudged about by day, preached, evangelised and baptize at night, and in those five years saw over 250 new Parishes formed with hundreds of new believers in each. That happened in 1988. That sounds like what we read about in chapter 10. What do you think? (Under the Thorn Tree; Richard Bewes, Christian Focus Publication 2017. P 72-73)

In the West, we have become fixated on rules and regulations and structures and everything that sounds good. The fact that the Church is failing in the West is the elephant in the room that is not talked about, or the fact that the king has no clothes on, if you know that children and philosophers story.

If all these things were necessary for the well-being of the Church, then the early Church would have failed, and the Church in the West would be flourishing. We mistake our provisioning ourselves with Christ provisioning us. Read what He says. 'Take nothing with you,' 'stay where you are received,' eat what is given you,' and heal the sick and say, 'the Kingdom is near.'

Now don't faint yet!

Jesus tells the disciples that the fields are white, ripe for harvest. Do you agree?

I don't!

However, if Jesus says it, and I disagree, do you know what? I'm wrong! Dead wrong, because I am not seeing as Jesus sees.

How is it that Jesus sees a harvest ready for reaping, and I see a nation becoming more brutal and immoral and proud? It's about seeing as Jesus sees. Let me explain. I have never encountered a fish that wanted to be caught, a worm that volunteered to be put on a hook, a carrot that banged on the kitchen door asking to be cooked, or, presumably a field of barley that wanted to be harvested. It happens, but not all that often, that someone comes to me and asks what they must do to be saved. Fish need to be fished for, crops have to be gathered, and souls need to be harvested. It is not about the willingness of the crop to be harvested, it is about the plan and will of the Lord of the Harvest. That field and harvest belongs to God by the way, and it is His right, and His alone, to command what to do with His field, His creation, His harvest.

The previous generations of Scotland have all passed. They were either harvested, that is, converted, or they died in their sins, and were lost. Today's generation of the living are the harvest. Either they will be harvested for God's barn, or will die and be lost. No crop goes on forever, it is either harvested or lost. The ripe harvest is people who are still alive. Every generation is ripe for harvest in God's eyes. They may not be willing, but they are ripe! The coming unborn generation is not ripe for harvest because it is not

yet born. Let's bring it down to the core, every person alive today is the ripe harvest that Jesus is speaking about. Only living people can be told of the Kingdom. The dead and the unborn are past harvest or not yet ripe for harvest. Today is the day of harvesting those who are alive, get it?

Can you see how Jesus views the field, and how I viewed it? I am looking for a nice harvest, Jesus is looking at a much more fundamental matter. The only people who can be saved are those who are alive today, so we are to go into the harvest and gather it in because the Lord of the Harvest tells us to! It is the duty of every generation of Christians to be the labourers and to go into the harvest.

This does not mean that every person will be saved. Look at verse 16. Jesus tells us that many will listen, and many will reject the message, but it is not about us being received or rejected, but about Christ. When an Ambassador is sent to a nation, the duty of the Ambassador is to deliver whatever his government or Monarch wishes to convey. If there is war, it is not over the rejection of the Ambassador, but the rejection of the person he represents. I confess to being far too thin skinned about all this. I get upset if I am rejected, but it is not about my feelings, but about God's will!

What Jesus says in v13 and following, serve to show how serious a matter receiving the messenger and the message is. There is a terrible consequence for rejecting the messenger, for in doing so, one is rejecting the one who sent the messenger, that is, Christ.

The Church in society is the messenger of Christ. It is a terrible thing if we fail to engage in our duty. It is a terrible thing for those who reject the message. The Church is much more important than we and others think.

Let us continue looking at the details of the passage.

Jesus says that the harvest is plentiful. When I look at the nature of the people who are to be harvested, it does not look good, but that is because my focus is not what Christ is looking at. As I said, I am looking at the sorts of people who are to be harvested, Christ looks at the huge body of people alive today and tells us to go into this field, His field, and harvest. We are to do this, not because of what we think, but because Christ, the Lord of the Harvest tells us to, and He is the Lord, and it is His field and His harvest. We are just the workers. People are either harvested, saved, or they fall ungathered and die in the field. That is what happens.

However, there is more. Not only are we sent to harvest in a field that contains willing and unwilling people, not only are we sent as we are and in the clothes we stand in, but look at verse 3. Christ sends them out as lambs, not even sheep, or rams, but lambs. This is a description of weakness and innocence. Christ sends them out amongst wolves!

In most encounters between lambs and wolves, it is usually the lambs that come off worse! This may happen, but it did not to the 72, and it did not happen to Bishop Garang, and it did not happen to multitudes of Christians who have gone out without name, power, status, money, provision and all the other things we so strongly feel are essential for us. Those of you who know the stories of George Muller of Bristol, and David Brainerd will see parallels. We never feel up to the task. It is Christ who makes us able. Are you like me, waiting to feel able? It doesn't happen.

Do you not find this an astonishing passage? It seems to me that Christ is emphasizing the imperative to go into the harvest in great weakness, and in reliant obedience to His command. It is not stated here, but I hear the echo of other words of Jesus, 'and I will be with you to the end of the age.' He will provide for His harvesters.

There are many other important matters contained in this passage, and I will mention them with only a brief comment. We need to think about these for ourselves, not just read them and the explanation and then say, 'well that's that then,' and forget all about it.

1. How Christ sees the world – ripe for harvest. It matters little how we see the world. It matters hugely how Christ sees the world and that we agree with Him and respond accordingly. There is a harvest to be gathered in Scotland. This includes the NE of Scotland, and this includes Newburgh, it includes our neighbours, our friends, and family. It includes our enemies, and sometimes our closest are also our enemies! All are Christ's crop!

2. The duty of disciples – to pray for labourers to be sent into the harvest. This has often been preached, and prayer is a duty of disciples. It is our duty to pray, to ask Christ to send workers into the harvest. It starts with prayer, continues with prayer, but does not stop with prayer.

3. Whose harvest is it? – The Lord of the Harvest – it is His responsibility because the harvest is His! Jesus said that He would build His Church. Sadly we tend to build our Church, and that is not like Christ's Church. In the same way, we think that the harvest is our responsibility, and ignore this clear statement that the Harvest is Christ's and it is His prerogative to send His workers to harvest whether they think it is ripe or not. Gulp! That's a challenging one!

4. What sort of harvest is it? It is plentiful. Do you remember what God told Paul about Corinth? He was told that God had many people there, that Paul would see a harvest even in sophisticated, worldly wise, grossly immoral and proud Corinth. There is no harvest which is too hard for Christ to reap. He gathered in a Saul and made him Paul. Christian biography is full of hard cases becoming lambs! The yield differs from place to place, but there is nowhere in the world where people have not become believers.

5. The duty of the disciples, to pray and to go and harvest. I think that it might have been Dr. A J Gordon that said that we can do more after we have prayed, and nothing

until we have prayed. How is our prayer life? Do we have one, or is it hit and miss, on and off. There are so many distractions that present themselves as urgent, but probably are not. We are to pray that God will send out many workers into the harvest, and go out into it ourselves. One of the sad side effects of having campaign evangelistic events and even full time ministers is that it is easy to think that we pay our money, and they do the stuff. We are all to do the stuff.

6. What sort of labourers does Christ want? – Lambs. I admit that I have never quite been so taken aback about this before, at least, I cannot remember being so. Lambs in the midst of wolves! Is it a typo, a joke? I don't think so at all. I think it is Jesus striking way of showing us that while we are to go, the field, the harvest, the work is all His, not ours.

7. Who is harvested? Wolves!

What do you make of that? Since Christ saves people while still dead in sin, should it surprise us that Christ harvests people who want to eat us up! What was Saul on his way to do when God knocked him off his high horse? In case you forgot, he was on his way to arrest Christians and destroy the Church. He was a howler, a wolf, yet he became a lamb.

8. What provision do we need to take? – None, God will supply.

This is very difficult to get our heads round in our country. However, even though this does not mean that we are to give up jobs and homes and all the rest, it does not give us an excuse to not go into the harvest. The harvest may begin at our breakfast tables, or just next door.

9. How is harvesting described? Labouring – its hard work!

No one said that it was going to be easy, or quick, or universally successful.

10. What are the labourers to do? Heal the sick and proclaim the coming kingdom.

11. It is a preparation for Christ to come. Christ has to act by His Holy Spirit to bring someone to faith. It is not enough just having had the message delivered, it must enter the heart, and only God can do that.

12. Received or unrecieved, brings blessing, or judgment – this is serious.

V17 and forward. The 72 return full of it all, Jesus rejoices, but tells them that it is better that they joy that their names are written in heaven. This seems to be throwing cold water on the excitement of a great success. Jesus says this to bring them back to the source. Whenever we see great things, it is very easy to think that somehow we are the reason for it all. We are never the reason for anything other than sin. All good is from Christ, and remembering that is the only safe place. It is a sadness to me that many Christians I know of, some closely, became victims of their own supposed success. This bred pride, and pride led to falls. Pray for ministers and elders. Pray that we be neither

over elated nor too cast down. All in offices in the Church are at risk from these two extremes.

So there we have it. I would plead with us all to consider seriously two things.

1. Are we in fact disciples? Have we believed in Christ alone for salvation, or are we still amongst the standing grain? Either we are gathered to Christ, or we die in the field.

2. If you are a believer, do you see that the harvest ripe for gathering refers not to easy places and willing people, but to living people who can still hear and still respond?

Finally, will we pray, and will we go into the harvest as lambs in the midst of wolves? I challenge myself.