

**Reading for today: Matthew 9:35 -10:8**

*The Workers Are Few*

*35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

*Jesus Sends Out the Twelve*

*10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.*

*2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

*5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.*

How have we reacted when we have seen the crowds – the demonstrations on the streets of our cities? Have we been supporting the cause(s)? Annoyed by the cause(s)? Astonished by the gatherings? are we not supposed to keep 2 metres apart?

We have done without crowds for a while now (I loose count of the weeks). Most humans are born to gather, we are born to be of a crowd. We can exist in tiny bubbles for a while, but we have this inbuilt need to also come together in larger groups; it is part of who we are as people. Many of us have missed being in friendly crowds - family gatherings, being together in church, village occasions, big shopping trips, coming together for our hobbies. Many children are longing for playtime with their school friends.

There is an energy in a crowd which can lift you - we sense that, when we consider how odd it will be to see the sporting occasions in empty stadiums. Although, not everyone is comfortable in crowds - we may be one of those for whom a crowd brings anxiety, fear even.

Sometimes it is so good to be part of a crowd, although crowds can get a bad press, and we who are distanced from them can all too easily condemn, particularly in this time of the coronavirus: the behaviour of people on bank holiday beaches; the fear of contagion spreading through Black Lives Matter rallies; the madness of massive Ikea queues.

We find today in our reading from Matthew’s Gospel that when Jesus saw the crowds, *he had compassion on them*.

Jesus was not always keen on crowds, we read that often he tried to get away from the crowds and have a moment in peace.

But nevertheless, Jesus did not avoid crowds, he let them gather to him when he preached, proclaimed, and healed. Maybe Jesus understood how crowds behave ‘as one’, but also that within each crowd there are individual people… with stories to tell… stories about things in their lives which led them to crowd together with others with whom they share common ground, common purpose.

*"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*

In Jesus’ eyes the crowds needed caring for. He saw that their well-being, their physical and spiritual health, was not being tended to. Vulnerable individuals, each member of the crowd was searching for help; and a model to follow, a concept to seek.

It is easy to condemn a Black Lives Matter protest if we distance ourselves from the stories. My brother-in-law who is a Methodist Minister in London knows of two families who have been split apart by the Windrush scandal, people who came to work, or children of those who came to work who have now been sent ‘home’. (One family has now been sorted and reconciled again). Compassion might come if we listen: maybe also a sense of injustice which we feel compelled to act on.

Jesus decided to go about tending the needs of the crowds by sending his friends and followers into the towns and villages, to work for him, giving them authority to heal diseases both physical and spiritual. He told them to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near. And he said that they would be doing it for nothing: ‘Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.’

Jesus had a small crowd of followers at the time, a group of people who were to stick together and follow his mission, and then to tend the needs of the other crowds, to bring healing to them. Whatever this small crowd of followers did would help the other crowds to see and feel and know the goodness of God at work among them. This ‘Jesus’ crowd was a good crowd, one which embraced all people, which people would appreciate having around.

We all take part in crowds. We all belong to them: families or church or social groups; from time to time we all take part in crowds who flock to town to shop, to the pub, or be entertained. Maybe even to protest, seeking change. For all crowds are driven to seek better. Like sheep without a shepherd we are all looking for safety, security, and comfort. We all want stability, good health, and food on the table. We seek belonging together. We are the crowds.

So today and every day let us keep the crowds in our prayers; all of them, particularly those crowds which trouble us. Let us pray for the crowds we miss being part of – whether large or small.

Let us be examples, open our eyes and ears and hearts to others, thus seeking the same compassion that Jesus had for the people in the crowds he saw.



With love and blessings

Liz