

3<sup>rd</sup> July 2016 Luke 10:1-20 'The Sending Out'

It came as a massive shock to the system. They had such high hopes sent like lambs to the slaughter, ill-prepared and led by poorly informed leadership. They thought it would be over by Christmas, it was necessary because of greed and intolerance and xenophobia. That was 100 years ago at the Somme. How little have we progressed since then?

Quite a lot, according to Barak Obama. In the ark of history, a phrase first used by Martin Luther King, there's never been a better time in history to be born: a black US president, votes and equality for an ever-increasing number of women globally, progressive attitudes to disability.

Yet, this last week feels as though we've slipped back a long way; incidents of racism reported to Bristol Council are usually two per week, there were fifty last week.

Our national leaders are in disarray, self-serving and unable to cast a vision of a way forward that seems worth backing. What is the to be joyful about? Much says God in Psalm 66.

How would you prepare someone for a journey, 'don't talk to anyone on the road and beware of wolves' sounds a bit like Little Red Riding Hood! What would you take on holiday if allowed only one thing? Kate, my wife and I joked we'd both take a cafetiere to ensure I had a daily fix of fresh coffee!

Bizarrely Jesus here tells the 72 not to take provisions, no money no extra shoes no bag – but why? So that they are only greeted and given hospitality by those genuinely spiritually hungry – those who would accept the greeting of fellowship and the message of God's imminent Kingdom of God (KOG). Here's the instructions for the sending out: pray God will send out the more workers; go on your way, say 'peace be upon this house'; remain in the same house, eat what is offered oh and heal the sick. Straightforward enough – but wait! Heal the sick, you can't be serious. Jesus is so matter-of-fact because the KOG is at hand; as the prophets foretold, when the lame walk the blind see the deaf hear, God is present. The disciples are preparing

the way making straight the way of the LORD and its He who reaps now that the harvest, His harvest is ripe.

The reading misses out vv12-15 – be wary of that and ask yourself why? In fact, jolly well read those first! Micah 6 tells us to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. We be confident in all scripture that it teaches us of a God who is slow to anger and rich in love that mercy triumphs justice BUT there needs to be justice and many don't have justice especially now it seems not in this life. God judges nations and communities, perhaps we've had a judgement on us for our inhospitable self-seeking attitudes and more seriously for turning our back on God. Social media is full of ranting about why God can't exist yet I feel no need to rant about the flat-earth society being a little naïve

The disciples return from their daring exploits and like kids with a new toy they're all excited that even demons submit to them. I wonder if Jesus' response is a little sarcastic, huh, I've seen Satan fall from heaven!

Jesus points out this is merely the task n hand orders from the boss commands from HQ. Gratitude is welcome but soldiers do as they're told without questions and are paid. Here the disciples are paid by hospitality from foreigners and strangers. What then is there to be joyful about? That their names are written in heaven.

Each November the unknown soldiers are remembered as we read them out from cenotaphs and memorials across the land. We acknowledge the sacrifice of many who remain unknown to us. By contrast Jesus says look forward for your service is realised by an upside-down topsy turvy world – the KOG where order not chaos reigns, love not hate reigns, healthy not sickness reigns, Jesus not Satan reigns.

Many frightened and unprepared people in our nation are standing at a point on that ark of history wondering if it's an abyss or a clear blue ocean they perceive ahead, whether it's going to be a heaven or a hell.

We, you and I, the church, this congregation are God's seventy to this community. He's calling to send us into the shops offices factories schools,

to ALDI, the Tobacco Factory, Ashton Gate Primary, to the barber's butchers bakers and candlestick makers.

You have within you the knowledge of the KOG you know of a God who heals and loves and judges rightly. You have within you power and light to bring order and justice and mercy in the power of words and actions because you have your orders from your leader who commands 'Love your neighbour'

As God has called Chris and is sending him out with our blessing, Christ might feel ill-equipped at times, in need of that extra pair of sandals. But, God is the wealth of nations the provider and sustainer and where all of us step out in faith to serve our Rock of Ages we will know the certainty and confidence that the KOG is near and that God is present with us always even though we might feel like lambs to the slaughter

There is much to rejoice about, as in Psalm 66, we just need to help each other and our world to look to the right person for leadership and his name is Jesus!