

# **Sermon for Sunday 14 June 2020**

## **by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader**

*Reading: Matthew 9. 35 – 10. 8*

### **Moved by Compassion**

Taking the Good News to the villages and towns, curing the disease and sickness, sending out the 12 and giving them authority to do the same. Later in the chapter, Jesus hints at a wider mission undertaken by all disciples and to all peoples. What is the motivation for all of this? Well, clearly Jesus needs to spread the Good News; if he has come to save the world by drawing all people to God, then quite simply more people are going to have to be told his Good News and follow him. But Jesus' mission is not motivated by numbers of followers added or the call to complete a son's mission from a heavenly Father out of duty - this mission is to be completed out of love for God the Father and the crowds to whom he ministers. Jesus preaches the Good News and heals individuals because he is moved by compassion.

This is said about Jesus on several occasions in Matthew's Gospel. Chapter 14 -Jesus boards a boat to get away from the crowds but on hearing that the crowds followed on foot, he has compassion on them and healed their sick. Matthew 15 - On realising that the crowd of 4,000 have been with him for three days and had nothing to eat, he has compassion on them. Matthew 20 - Jesus has compassion on two blind men and restores their sight. In these instances, and others, Jesus is responding to individuals or specific groups of people. But in Matthew 9. 36 we read: 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep'. Here, Jesus is not just moved by specific examples of need but also by the underlying and suffocating deep

and exploited by their political, religious and civic institutions.

Compassion for Jesus was more than the feelings of sympathy and sadness towards the people suffering. The Greek verb used means 'to be moved in the inward parts. Such deep feeling suffused the very being of Jesus. It created an imperative to respond to the deepest needs of the crowd; to do something was a concrete necessity.

With Jesus, spreading the Good News of the Kingdom of God is not just talk. In reality on earth, the Kingdom arrives with Jesus' ministry, although it has still to be fully established when all creation is renewed; when God's will WILL be done on earth as in heaven. Meanwhile, Jesus is bringing in the Kingdom - it is not enough to talk - the kingdom is enacted - evil and suffering is overcome - demons are dismissed, the lame are healed and sight is restored. And out of the chaos, many listen, will see for the first time and follow Jesus. The Kingdom of God grows like a tiny Mustard Seed (Matthew 13. 31-32).

Our calling is to follow the Way of Jesus and to follow the examples of the early disciples - not just preaching about God but walking the talk as well. The Good News of Jesus Christ is more than explaining about forgiveness, healing and resurrection, it has to translate into action - to address the spiritual needs of the crowds in the wider sense and help bring about change. Look around us, we see the same as Jesus - harassed and helpless people - some of us may feel it, too. Our walk in Jesus' footsteps must be not about duty or pity but fuelled by compassion and a profound belief in the dignity and equality of people - all made in the 'image of God'. Unlike Jesus, it is not a case of us being perfectly loving; before we act, we need to consider our own communal responsibility for injustice and the resulting lack of peace. It requires a conscious effort to say to ourselves that, although I may not personally

condoned institutionalised racism, I, and each individual among us, am still party to it.

Jesus calls us to stand and look with him at the needs of the crowds, recognise and understand something of the perspective of our loving heavenly Father, and so feel a compassion that translates into action. True prayer brings hope and will lead to change. We are all part of God's plan to bring healing, salvation and peace.

