

Sermon on Wednesday 8 July 2020

by Rev. Bill Church

(Gospel reading: Matthew 10. 1-8)

Quarantine is something we are hearing a lot about nowadays. People arriving in this country may, or may not, have to go into quarantine. Travellers from this country may, or may not, have to go into quarantine. When services in church start again, the books will be quarantined for two days before and after.

Quarantine is nothing new. The word itself is from the Italian for 'forty'. From when the Venetian Republic during the Black Death made all ships from outside wait forty days before unloading. Dickens' novel *Little Dorrit* starts in 1826 with a disparate group of people stuck in uncomfortable quarantine in Marseilles, and then for the rest of the book traces their interweaving stories linked by their shared experience.

The twelve disciples were named by Jesus who then said, "I send you out". 'Apostello' – hence 'apostle'.

The rest of their lives grew out of that shared experience. They were all men and all Jews (though two had Greek names), with a lot of Galileans and a lot of fishermen, but hardly uniform. One, Simon the Zealot, had been an extreme nationalist; another, Matthew the tax collector, would have been seen as a collaborator.

Jesus insisted: "You did not choose me; I chose you." There had been no open advertisement for the jobs. And the job advert would have been very odd:

"No qualifications required. Robust on-the-job training provided.

Salary: Nil.

Prospects: Dire.

Housing: Definitely not provided.

Company car? You must be joking.”

Some of the apostles, Peter and John, we know much about; others we know only by name. They quarrelled, they bickered about precedence, they faltered, they were sometimes unsympathetic to those seeking Jesus’ help, they were slow to understand. Well, in that, are they not like some congregations throughout history up to the present day?

But, together and boosted by the Holy Spirit, the twelve apostles must be the most influential and ultimately successful group ever. That is an encouragement to us and all Christians to stumble along behind them as best we can.