



REFLECTION

BY THE REVEREND FAITH BAILEY

'LOVING - MAKING THE LOVING PRESENCE
OF JESUS KNOWN IN OUR MIDST'

SUNDAY 14TH JUNE

LECTIONARY READINGS:

Romans 5:1–8; Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

God's generosity

Shown supremely in Jesus

This is the message of Jesus, the message of the Gospels: that God himself, the Word
'became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes,

the one-of-a-kind glory,

like Father, like Son,

Generous inside and out,

true from start to finish (John 1:14).'

Jesus' glory was not in his high and mighty power, but in his interactions with the poor, his alleviation of suffering, his reversing of the effects of sin and death, and his ushering in of the upside-down kingdom where the last will be first and where he seeks out and saves the lost (Luke 19:10).

The Harvest is Plentiful

Jesus' commissioning of the disciples challenges us today, as modern disciples, to see our faith as actively responding to and partaking in God's mission. The task of healing, restoration, and godly leadership is not confined to Jesus alone, but is entrusted to us, his followers, to all of us who have benefitted from and know his peace, his grace and his salvation.

With such a task, it is no wonder the helpers are few. If we take the task on ourselves in our own strength, we will burn out, become bad-tempered and judgemental, fall foul of self-aggrandisement. It is through God's love, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, that we can generously share in Christ's mission and take it wherever we go. (Romans 5)

The Need for Compassion

The Gospel reading talks about an active and compassionate Jesus fulfilling his self-proclaimed mission in Luke 4.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”

He went to where the people were – took time to come near to them, even though, as we see in other passages, people would willingly travel to see him.

Jesus was moved with compassion for so many people, but He saw beyond the obvious. For us, it is so easy to recognise and respond to an obvious need.

I was struck by this at our Fare Share pantry the other week. As helpers, we had made judgments about who was most in need based on how people looked, how they behaved, or where they lived, and we ended up giving those people preferential treatment. It took some of the other users to challenge us, saying, “We all come here for our own reasons – they may not be obvious, but they are real to us.” Their words were a reminder that need is not always easy to recognise. Jesus saw beyond prejudice and beyond the “easy to spot” poor.

We see this all through the Gospels. In Luke 19, which I quoted in the introduction, Jesus chooses to spend time with Zacchaeus, a tax collector. Zacchaeus was wealthy and held status, yet he was also an outcast, someone many people would have dismissed as the wrong kind of person. Jesus consistently mixed with those society pushed to the margins. I have an affinity with Zacchaeus. When I was looking for my first job, I applied to be a tax inspector. During the initial interviews, someone asked whether tax collectors struggled with friendships or experienced rejection. The response was that this was not a problem if they mixed with the “right kind” of people. Jesus, however, deliberately chose the ‘wrong kind’ of people to be with. He ignored social boundaries and welcomed people others preferred to avoid.

Compassion due to lack of leadership

Jesus didn't just bring physical healing – his compassion was sparked most acutely by the lack of leadership: “he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

He modelled a leadership that is deeply relational, restorative, empowering others to be coworkers with him.

In the list of disciples here we see such a variety of characters. Looking at the list of the twelve: the “first” apostle Peter will deny the Lord three times and the last apostle Judas will betray him to death, while two apostles were fierce political opponents, , tax collector Matthew working for the Romans, Simon the Zealot looking to depose them..

Jesus wasn't ignorant of their character flaws or political differences, but he still called them and empowered them to continue his mission.

The words he used to send them out in chapter 10 v8 mirror what he himself was doing.

‘Proclaim this message:

The kingdom of heaven has come near. ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; Freely give.’”

It was not simply about physical healing, but restoration to wholeness – bringing God's shalom, his Kingdom.

God's love, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, is given to us to share generously, to take into every place we go.

Here in Matthew the mission is solely to the Jews, but with the coming of the Holy Spirit it is extended:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1)

We see in Jesus the enormity - the jaw-dropping enormity - of God's love and generosity.

We are not called to keep it to ourselves, holding on to it like Gollum's precious in *The Lord of the Rings*, but to share it wholeheartedly, just as Jesus did, just as he commissioned his disciples to do, and just as he calls us, his followers, to do.

God's generous love is a gift to be shared generously.