

Second Sunday after Pentecost 14th June 2020

The Rev'd Colleen Clayton

Text;
Matthew 9:35-10:8

Once upon a time there was a wise abbot of a monastery who was the friend of an equally wise rabbi. This was in the old country, long ago, when times were always hard, but just then they were even worse. The abbot's community was dwindling, and the faith life of his monks was fearful, weak, and anxious. He went to his friend and wept. His friend, the Rabbi, comforted him, and said "there is something you need to know, my brother. We have long known in the Jewish community that the Messiah is one of you."

"What," exclaimed the abbot, "the Messiah is one of us? How can this be?"

But the Rabbi insisted that it was so, and the abbot went back to his monastery wondering and praying, comforted and excited. Once back in the monastery, he would pass by a monk and wonder if he was the one. Sitting in chapel, praying, he would hear a voice and look intently at a face and wonder, is he the one. The abbot had always been kind, but now began to treat all of his brothers with profound kindness and awe, ever deeper respect, even reverence. Soon everyone noticed. One of the other brothers came to him and asked him what had happened to him.

After some coaxing, the abbot told him what the rabbi had said. Soon the other monk was looking at his brothers differently, with deeper respect and wondering. Word spread quickly: The Messiah is one of us. The monastery was suddenly full of life, worship, love and grace. The prayer life was rich and passionate, devoted, and services were alive and vibrant. Soon the surrounding villagers came to the services, listening and watching intently, and many joined the community of monks. After their novitiate, when they took their vows, they were told the mystery, the truth that their life was based upon, the source of their strength, the richness of their life together: The Messiah is one of us.

The monastery grew and expanded into house after house, and the monks grew in wisdom and grace before each other and in the eyes of God. And they say still, that if you stumble across this place where there is life and hope and kindness and graciousness, that the secret is the same: The Messiah is one of us.¹

Could it be that the Messiah is one of us? Each week we declare, *We are the body of Christ*. The Messiah is present amongst us, embodied by us. We are the hands, voice, smile, actions of the Messiah. Do we recognise that in each other? Do we recognise that in ourselves? It is so easy to think of all the ways in which we fail, all our frustrating, irritating characteristics, all the things we think should be different or

¹Excerpted from [*Mary: Shadow of Grace*](#) by Megan McKenna.

better in ourselves and each other. If we could truly believe that the Messiah is to be found at St Matthew's Cheltenham, how would we treat each other?

In our Gospel reading today we hear that, *Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness (9.35). Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness (10.1)*

For Matthew, to be a disciple is to be sent to do the work of Jesus. Jesus has been at work, actively engaged in God's mission of love for the world, and now he sends his disciples to join in the same task. God's desire for humanity is grace and freedom, health, life, and wholeness. This is the task that the disciples take up. It is the same task which we are called to share.

When people want to achieve an important task, they choose and send the brightest and best, the strongest & best equipped, the most experienced and committed people. This is not the way of God. There is no task more important than sharing God's liberating love with the world, and yet, Jesus entrusts the task to a very strange bunch. The disciples are poorly educated Galileans. Amongst them are James & John who are ambitious for themselves, Matthew who is a despised tax collector, Peter who is always putting his foot in his mouth and who will later deny Jesus three times, and *Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him (10.4)*. Their only qualification is that they keep following Jesus.

We could be tempted to think that if Jesus had found himself surrounded by better quality disciples, he would have sent them. He simply had to send the twelve because they were the only ones he had. We would be right to think that. That is the point. Jesus always sends the ones he has. We do not qualify ourselves to be sent by virtue of education, status, family connection, by the number of years we have been connected with the church, or by how hard we work. None of these things matter to God. We are sent because we are the ones Jesus has. To think anything else is simply hubris that prevents us from seeing the presence of the Messiah in ourselves and in others.

Human institutions want to recruit only the best. But Jesus sends us all, exactly as we are. God's love is for the whole world and each one of us is called to the task of sharing God's love, even though at times we all deny, fail, and betray him.

In the verses immediately following the ones we heard today, Jesus tells his disciples that they are not to take anything extra with them to help them in their task; no money, no bag, no extra clothes. This is another way in which God's way differs from ours. We want to hang onto all the things that we think we need. We don't want to leave behind our money, our physical resources, the things that are precious to us and that make us believe in ourselves. But God's mission is not about these things. Our resources allow us to think that we can rely on our own strength rather than on God. When our focus is on what we think we need for our task we can easily become obsessed with protecting our stuff in order to ensure our future. This destroys our trust in God.

We are called to share God's love through the strength of God's Holy Spirit at work in our lives. To proclaim the good news, that the kingdom of heaven has come near. We are sent out, not with the equipment that we think we need, but with the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, *give us this day our daily bread*.

There is an inseparability between the work of Jesus and the work of his disciples. We are sent out to participate in the mission of God, which is the freedom, health, wholeness, and love of all creation. Part of our task is to see where the work of Jesus is already taking place, and to add our efforts to building up God's realm.

Could it be that the Messiah is to be found at St Matthew's Cheltenham? Yes. Yes, the Messiah is one of us. We are Christ's presence in the world. This is not a matter for our own personal faith and salvation. Jesus did not give the disciples authority for their own benefit but for the hurting, sick, leaderless world. This is our task. It is not an optional extra. Our true worship is not what takes place in this building but what takes place when we leave in peace to *love and serve the Lord*. By the grace of God, we are the embodiment of Christ in the world and just as God sees Christ in us, we are called to see Christ in all who we meet

The Messiah is one of us.