

St Brandon's, Sermon for 14th June 2020.

Romans 5:1-8, Matthew 9:35-10:8

Go Forth and Tell.

Alison Hobbs

Well here we are, still in the mire of Covid- times, wondering what recovery looks like, wondering what we are supposed now to be doing – or not doing, wondering how to keep the show on the road, with many hurting, grieving, tired and at the end of their tether.

And if that were not enough, the issue of racial injustice – Black lives matter - has provoked more pain and anger amongst those who have so long been on the receiving end of racism.

So when the readings talk about harassed and helpless crowds, instructions to '*cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons*', it sounds a rather familiar picture.

We can take comfort from the fact that Jesus was at work in that picture, '*teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness*'.

Proclaiming the good news first to '*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*', knowing it was vital the Jews believed before he took the message wider to the Gentiles, Samaritans, and the ends of the earth.

And we take comfort from the fact that Jesus is still at work in our world now, doing the same; we know it because we have faith - we believe - and now and again we see and know it from our own experience.

The passage Anne read from Paul though, is one of those that feels a bit of a stretch to want to embrace:

Paul talks about suffering as if it were necessary, or desirable, or both:

*“we **boast** in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” ...*

For Paul, suffering was the astonishing and shocking hallmark of Christ.

It was the absolute reversal of everything we expect of Kings, powerful rulers and leaders.

Why would they want to suffer if they had the power not to?

So when Jesus went to the cross for us, it was the very opposite of what the Jews would have associated with the actions of a powerful God, with their God.

Paul knew there was only one God, the God of the Jews and, therefore, it was essential that they came in sufficient numbers to believe Jesus was the Son of God, otherwise, the whole oneness of God would be lost.

He had to be sure they recognised Jesus Christ as their long awaited Messiah, the promised one who was coming to save them, the people of Israel.

So Paul focusses always on the cross, the suffering and dying for us – regardless of how little we deserved it – because that action by Jesus of going willingly to the cross, loving us to the end, was to bring us back into a right relationship with God.

No longer are we required to earn our place in heaven, we are offered it as a free gift if we but believe: we’re justified (made right with God) through our faith in him; and that gives us the Peace of God; the security of hope in eternal life and confidence through all the trials life on earth can throw at us.

Isn't that just what we need doses and doses of at the moment?
Peace, hope and confidence?

So many people are simply in stuck in the suffering, and that in itself is not God's plan: he is a loving God who does not seek to hurt.

Back to our gospel reading - That was why Jesus looked at the crowds with compassion: they looked like sheep without a shepherd, or like a field full of wheat with no-one to harvest it. That is why he said to his disciples to pray for God to send out labourers to gather in his harvest: these were people who were hungry for the kingdom of God but didn't know where to find it.

Perhaps this is Jesus' way of getting his disciples prepared for the next stage when he summons the twelve and authorises them to do the same healing of body, mind and spirit that he himself does, the same preaching to Israel about the good news, '*The kingdom of heaven has come near.*'

That Kingdom of heaven is what we pray about every time we pray "Our Father – Thy kingdom come". It is the desire for evidence that God is in charge of our world, that his values of peace, love, justice and mercy are the ruling forces, the ones that will come increasingly to bear, the ones that will win out, the ones that will ensure that Black lives matter because every life matters to God, and must be honoured.

We are in what people are referring to as strange times ; the new salutation is ‘keep safe and well’ - willing and wanting the other person to avoid the suffering caused by Covid-19.

Dare we do better than that?

Dare we go further than that?

Dare we express a hope that they may hear a hint of faith in God from us?

This is a season to be grasped: people need and want direction and hope with a new keenness: getting the message out is the work of now, so we can hope for change in our time, and a future more imbued with Kingdom values than of recent decades.

A future in which people are more compassionate towards each other and better stewards of the world God gave us to enjoy and flourish in; as part of a great outpouring of love and abundant life; not a meanly partitioned and coveted richness but a blessing of riches given for all.

And above all, an abundance of life and joy, and hope, and peace bestowed on us through faith in the living God who suffered, died and rose again for you and me – - and so many others who do not know it ... yet!

Remember at the end of the service, when we have partaken as one body in the remembrance of Jesus’ salvation story told in the Eucharistic prayer, that we are the disciples now – many more than twelve – that Jesus sends out.

Think on it, and pray on it when we come to sing the closing hymn instructing us to Go Forth and Tell.

Amen