

First Sunday after Trinity

Collect; God of truth, help us to keep your law of love and to walk in ways of wisdom, that we may find true life in Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

2 Corinthians: 4.5-12: For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹ For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Gospel: Matthew 9.35—10.8 Then 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. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.' ^{10.1} 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. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.'

Reflection:

The challenge of what is meant by the living out of Christian discipleship has been present from the time of Jesus. It was taught by him to the disciples and is found described by St Paul in the experience of the early Christian communities.

"Travel lightly" could be an umbrella title for this and alongside this a recognition of our common human vulnerability.

The last 12 weeks have meant that people have been challenged by different experiences to reflect on both of these things. Those working in demanding roles have had to put aside many things to concentrate and focus attention on saving lives or to ensure essential services have continued. Those self-isolating, those who have suffered physically or those stressed or anxious may well have found particular meaning in Paul's description of our human bodies as being like fragile clay jars.

Regularly we have prayed to be kind to ourselves and patient with each other. A starting point for honestly accepting the difficult situation the pandemic has led to and the challenge to our ways of living that it has brought. The loss of loved ones with the experience of being separated from those closest to them has been at the sharp end of the crisis. The exposure to the virus that there has been for health and social care workers, for others in public services and the vulnerability of particular groups of people to the infection has created a situation in our country and across the world that has required a response unlike anything before. There will be much to learn and many scientists are engaging with issues in urgent ways.

We will have our own thoughts about our government's response. Most people recognised from early on how serious the situation is. When instructions have been given that were clear, the vast majority of us accepted them but when they were vague and open to a variety of interpretations, we have felt frustrated and sometimes angry with those giving the mixed measures and with those responding to them by acting in inappropriate ways.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus once again gives us the image of the Good Shepherd. The shepherd who knows all his flock by name and who searches for those who others have given up on, those who may have given up on themselves. Following in this way has required a response at this time of the pandemic which focuses on humanly responding to the needs of those most affected by the consequences of the virus. Which focuses on the change of ways of living, on the increased stress and anxiety; for many because of over work and for many fear of what the future might hold. The other image we have had in the bible readings in recent weeks has been that of light shining out of darkness. For Christians, a growing understanding that the suffering and death of Jesus helps bring reality to this image.

Faith being based not on optimism that everything will just turn out fine, but faith that connects the reality of suffering with the human intent that can cause it. Fear of difference, selfish obsession with wealth, not applying wisdom to difficult situations. Light to be found when these things are challenged which may need peaceful protest from hearts and minds determined to keep the hope of change alive.