

1st Sunday after Trinity 2020

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and illness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on 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 workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'
(Matthew 9:35-38)

The key festivals of the Christian church are over for another year, well for the next six months. We're in the Trinity season, when the furnishings and vestments turn to green and remain green until we get to Advent, with the exception of a saint's day here or there. In the church calendar this time is often known as Ordinary time. There's not very much going on in the way of big celebrations. We simply follow our regular practices of worship and through our gospel readings turn our thoughts to the general ministry of Jesus. Just the ordinary stuff.

This year is anything but ordinary though. We're still dealing with the extraordinary circumstances of a global pandemic. We may be relaxing the regulations but we're not back to where we were before the virus started spreading through our country. Our churches will be allowed to open from this week for private individual prayer and for small funerals, but the management of that is going to be far from ordinary. We'll have to keep our distance from each other. There will be no books available. Singing is strongly discouraged. There will be no hugs or handshakes. How long that will go on for we don't know.

But those are just the superficial changes to life post-Covid. The impact of the infection on individual lives will have taken its toll too. There will be people who feel that life will never again be the ordinary routine that it was. Lives have been lost. Health workers have seen death at a rate they've never before had to contend with. Families have been unable to be with loved ones at the end of life. Friends have been unable to join the bereaved in mourning. Those who have recovered will not know for some time what lasting damage this may have caused to their health. Even when there has been no direct impact, the extended lockdown will have brought its own stresses. Whatever we might think, I doubt any of us will be quite the same again, not quite as ordinary as we were. Everyone will need healing in some way.

That, as our gospel passage tells us, is precisely what Jesus recognised. Along with curing every disease and sickness he saw that the crowds were harassed and helpless. He had compassion for them because they needed healing. He has compassion for this world today, for all who are crying out for healing, for everyone who is struggling because their lives are no longer ordinary. But, as Jesus said, the task is one which calls for many workers. Initially he called the twelve disciples and charged them with sharing in his work. With his authority they too offered healing.

We are his disciples today. Can we be the labourers he needs in his harvest? We're ready to get back into our church buildings, those beacons that show the presence of God in the community. I've no doubt that we'll tackle the practical tasks with efficiency and expertise. We also have to ask ourselves whether we can bring about healing where it's needed. Jesus came to show God's love to the world and that love is anything but ordinary. That extraordinary love is something which Jesus sends out to share just as he did the twelve who were his first companions. So, as we emerge into a post-pandemic world let us go out into our community showing compassion for the harassed and helpless and bringing healing through the gift of his love. Amen