

2ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Revd. Cara Heafey, Associate Minister, Summertown URC



Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

**READ:
MATTHEW 9:35-
10:8**

"...I am sending you
out like sheep into the
midst of wolves..."

REFLECT:

The gospel passage set for this week is the account of the “great commission”, Jesus giving authority and instructions to the twelve disciples and sending them out. Their mission: to proclaim the good news, that the kingdom of God is near. To cure the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead.

You may be wondering, as I am, what are we supposed to do with a ‘sending out’ story during partial lockdown? How can we hear Jesus’ words as a call to mission, and action, when it’s still recommended – for the good of others, as well as for our own safety – that we stay home as much as possible, and when out keep our distance? When receiving hospitality is, at best, restricted? Even with this jarring disconnect, though, I’ve been living with this passage in mind this week and noticing resonances everywhere...

When I think of the danger the disciples are being sent into I'm reminded of conversations among some of us about our growing fear of going outside and seeing people, especially larger-than-comfortable numbers of people. As we contemplate emerging from a long period of lock-down, the outside world can seem a threatening place.

In response to the reflection I sent out for Pentecost Sunday I've been privileged to hear some of your own experiences of the Holy Spirit at work in your lives, and among them are some fine examples of Jesus' promise in 10:19: the Holy Spirit giving the right words for the moment, when we're faced with a trauma or crisis and find ourselves at the limit of our own abilities.

And I'm reminded of Jesus' very specific instructions to the disciples as I learn about the directions mothers instill in their black sons. In a video that's 'gone viral' on social media, Cameron Welch, an 18 year old from Texas, lists the rules his mother taught him for survival. They include: "Don't put your hands in your pockets." "Don't put your hoodie on." "Never leave a store without a receipt or a bag, even if it's just for a pack of gum." These innocent actions are things I'm privileged to be able to do without thought or fear. But the mother of a black son surely understands the heart of Jesus when he says, in 10:16, "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

I'm conscious that this reflection is a handful of disjointed ideas! This week it's all I have to offer. But perhaps they will start a conversation. Here are some questions for us to ponder and pray on, and as always I welcome hearing your thoughts:

- If we're not facing dangers or persecution, are we doing something wrong? Does it mean that the world is a safe place? Or are there those who have a different experience / perspective?
- Jesus expects great things from his disciples... even though they're small in number, far from perfect and apparently full of doubts and questions. What does he ask of us?



FURTHER READING:

Sharing the good news with others feels challenging enough, but healing the sick? Raising the dead?

For anyone wanting to grapple with what obedience to this call might look like, I highly recommend a book called "Jesus Freak" by Sarah Miles. It's an easy, engaging and inspiring read. You can source a copy from one of the online bookshops (it's in stock at www.eden.co.uk if you're wanting to avoid a certain massive tax-dodging retailer), or I have a copy I'd be happy to lend.

CONTACTS:

If you need any help, have a prayer request, or would like someone to talk to; please contact your elder or one of us:

Revd. Pauline Main
Tel: 01865 513581 or
07931 305803

Revd. Cara Heafey
Tel: 01865 863053 or
07835 172206