

Matthew 9:35 - 10:23

Wisdom 6:1-11 Love and reconciliation.

For me, and I suspect for many of us, Sunday evening is a time for reflection on the previous week and preparation for the next. What have we done with the week? Have we completed any of the tasks we set ourselves this time last week? How has our life moved on, and have we made a difference to any of the issues we felt needed our attention? If not, why not?

In our Gospel reading, we have just heard how Jesus went round proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God, curing every disease and every sickness. He had compassion on the crowds as he knew they were confused and helpless - like sheep without a shepherd. And the Jews he was talking to knew what that meant.

Since they had returned from exile, their homeland had been invaded and ruled, first by Greeks, then by Romans and they were no longer a free and independent people. They hated this, of course, and dreamt that one day a new monarch would come along, a military genius who would call them to arms, and drive their enemies out of the country. So when Jesus told them that the kingdom of God would arrive any day now, they were delighted, and confident that he would start a revolution.

But he didn't. Instead, as they saw it, he **wasted** his time healing the sick, eating with criminals, cheering up the **depressed** and going on about '**love**'. How was that going to drive out the Romans from their land? However, the **Romans** were also becoming very worried. If this Jesus claimed he would bring in a new kingdom, surely he must be **dangerous**, a **revolutionary**. So the **Romans** reasoned that Jesus needed to be silenced; but if they arrested him **their** kingdom might fall apart. Then, we find, the **priests** too were scared. If there **was** a revolution, they would lose their powerful positions. One way or another, **everyone** seemed to feel there could be trouble ahead!

But, we **now** know that they completely misunderstood the kind of revolution Jesus was on about. He was talking about overturning people's attitudes and beliefs; but he didn't just talk - he got involved- caring for the weak and healing all the ills of society. And what was this about loving your enemies? The Jews regarded the occupying **Romans** as **their** enemies. How would we feel on hearing such a phrase? Had Jesus lost the plot? Surely, if this was put into practice, it could turn the whole world upside down!

Which is why most people ignored his advice, and still do today. 'Love our enemies indeed?' What rubbish! If you're weak, they'll get the better of you and take away everything you have. Isn't that what most people think? But doesn't it all depend on what we **mean** by love. Love isn't **weak**; its the **most powerful** force on earth.

Jesus said to his disciples,

'Proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You **received** without payment; **give** without payment'

The good news about the kingdom of God was that the long-promised Messiah had come. The healing miracles were a **sign** that this was true. In our gospel passage, Jesus, having told his followers to pray that God would send out labourers into his harvest, summons his twelve disciples and gives

them authority to cast out unclean spirits and to cure all sickness and disease. Then he sends them out into the community.

He warned them that life would not be a bed of roses for them, as in spreading his message they would be like sheep being set loose among wolves. But the Spirit of his Father would be with them, giving them the words and strength they needed. Two thousand years on, where are the Roman or Greek empires? But Christ's offer still stands. He still needs workers who believe his message and want to share it with others.

If **we** believe him, we can comfort others and show them the way to live, because we have been given his authority; we have the Holy Spirit in us, and we ourselves have been helped with our own problems through the years- by God through his workers. We can vouch for God's faithfulness from our own experience..

If we are **world**-centred, we are facing a very uncertain future, especially as **nations**, lacking clear goals, are becoming more and more protectionist and less interested in sharing the world's resources with those who need more of them.. However, Jesus has offered **us** the chance to be **God** centred -**in** the world but not **of** the world- and has shown us how to respond to the needs of those we meet.

Jesus meant his disciples, then and now, to heal those with sick attitudes, to bring outcasts back into society, to drive out selfishness from people's hearts, and to share what we have with the needy. The sheep are still looking for the guidance and protection of a shepherd. God still needs our help with the harvest. So this evening, as we reflect and plan, let's try to see things through God's eyes and in the weeks ahead use the gifts **he's** given us for **his** work.

--We received without payment. Let's give without payment.--