

**Matt.9.35-10v8 (Ez 34 – parts)St. Augustine’s 8.30 & 10.30 am sermon 12
June 2005**

“I’ve shown you how it’s done, now it’s your turn!”

How will you spend this summer ?

What will you do? Where will you go? Do you have carefully-laid plans, or are you one of those who like to up and go on the spur-of-the-moment.....grabbing your tent, sleeping bag and water bottle on the way?

Perhaps you have children or grand-children who are off to one of those special camps, where they’ll have lots of outdoor fun and adventure with other kids.....

Maybe you need to be *here* through the next months to work.....maybe finances won’t allow for you to have a vacation this summer, or perhaps you have already used up your annual leave?

I wonder - Is the summer-time (when it finally arrives!) sometimes an excuse for not coming to church, or can it be an opportunity to help the church grow?

Wherever we are and whatever we end up doing, there’s something that we all hold in common and that maybe we should all be doing – no matter where we are. As part and parcel of our calling as disciples – followers of Christ, we are each to be part of the evangelistic outreach of the church. That is to say, whether introvert or extravert, good at witnessing to others or terribly bad at it, shy, embarrassed, tongue-tied or tongue-loose.....whether we think it is definitely *not* our gift and we really think somebody else should be doing it or even more , we think that’s what **we pay Jonathan for!** I have news for you: all of us are called and commissioned to “ *go out into the world and tell others the good news of Jesus Christ*”. (Mtt 28)

There are a whole bunch of people out there (inc. our own family and friends) who are incredibly lonely, starving hungry – but not for physical food, and totally lost.....

And Jesus says ‘go to them’
‘go to the lost sheep.....’

Loneliness is a sort of home-sickness for God;’ it is a feeling of not counting, of not mattering to anyone, and not being significant.....

Glenda Jackson said “ *It is very lonely being a human being-even when you are in a crowd.*”

Mother Theresa said – “ *The greatest disease today is not starvation but loneliness*”.....

Yet people **are** starving – starving for God, without necessarily knowing it.....and that brings a loneliness.....

In our OT reading from Ez. 34, we read that the shepherds of Israel *had long neglected the flock entrusted to them by God.....the sheep were neglected, maimed and scattered and nobody seemed to care. Then we're told that the **Lord** himself would shepherd the flock.....*

The great conviction of Matthew's gospel is that the Shepherd of Israel has come! What God was planning has come to pass through the action of Jesus.

Here we see **Jesus**, the Good Shepherd (of John 10). go out to do the job of Mission, and so model it for his disciples. He had *compassion* on those who were lost and without a shepherd.....do you know what word is used here for compassion ? What it really means? What JC has for the crowd is 'Esplangnisthe' - which means he was *moved in his guts* – literally, I understand it, his ***guts were twisted inside him***, he was deeply stirred.....that's true compassion and it results in immediate action.....I wonder - does the church care in this way? And of course Jesus also preached and taught and healed

And then he told his disciples to go out and do the same.....

" *You've seen me do it*" he might have said " *now you go out and do the same. Here are your instructions*".

Michael Green, in his Commentary on Matthew, outlines 7 truths about Mission...

1. Mission is CRUCIAL.

The early church, St Augustine's – *any* church, will not grow without evangelism at the heart of its life. And that evangelism has to be backed by prayer ...

This is the task of each of us who seek to follow Christ; While it is true that some folk will find their *own* way to a church , the general truth is that it is down to individuals like you and me , within our regular daily relationships, to do the **witnessing**, the **telling**, the **praying**, the **bringing**.....

Jesus sent his disciples **out**; they didn't stay at home reading theology books, or writing sermons. **Mission is vital and we need to be part of it.**

You may not feel it is your gift, really not '*your thing*' at all, but the good news is (this is the 2nd truth about mission) - it is SHARED.....

2. Mission is SHARED.

The disciples, notice, went out in a *group* (what a relief!). And mutual support in this way leads to a greater depth of fellowship and doesn't put the burden on just one individual. We *aid each other* in such a venture. One of the reasons for burnout in Christian ministry is that it is often carried out SOLO. Jesus didn't teach that. It wasn't just one person going out by themselves to do the job – in the NT they went out in pairs or larger teams...The NT pattern is not to go out and get in a BILLY GRAHAM figure either, that somehow a “professional” can do the evangelism for us (of course people like him *are* greatly used and have brought many to faith in Christ). The pattern modelled by the NT is to go out and witness together.....

If you consider the ‘team’ who were together in the venture we read about in Matthew 9-10 they seem a very mixed bunch!

Contemplative John
 Fisherman James
 Hot-bloodied Peter
 Cool, calculating Matthew

Imagine too the joy and fellowship that would have been theirs as they returned to their ‘sending’ church to report back. Mission needs to be shared,

3. Mission is SUSTAINED

It all **begins** with Jesus' call to them and to us to ‘*come, follow me*’.....
 And moves on into *infinity* at the **end** of Matt's gospel with the Great Commission to ‘*go into all the world and preach the good news*’ Here in the **middle** of the gospel it is emphasised anew – mission should be a continuing responsibility of us all – an ongoing part of our daily lives as Christians, There can also be special evangelistic outreach too, which can be a huge boost to a church, but that only really works well when the church has done its job on a **daily** basis already. That means you and I sustaining **ongoing** relationships with neighbours and friends, regularly **praying** for them and looking for **opportunities** to care for them and share with them, being ‘*always prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in us*’ 1 Peter 3.15

We really should not expect somebody *e/se* to come and do what **we** ought to be doing.

4. Mission is COMPLEX

These verses also illustrate and model what parish ministry should be; a balance of going out there, preaching, teaching, healing, having **compassion** on the lost (remember what we said compassion really means?) driving out evil spirits, raising the dead.....RAISING THE DEAD?! Yes, that's in the list in 10 v 8! But, raising the dead?! Hey, I wasn't shown how to do that at theological college!

Actually, I wish I could have 'raised the dead' this past Weds..... it was Pete's birthday, and he was working from home. It was lunch-time, and 5 yr old Abby had just gone out into the garden (which she does all the time). Within a couple of minutes she was calling to me to come and see what she'd found –

In her hands (hope you're not squeamish) were half a dozen baby mice. But they were dead. Drowned in a bucket which had filled with water due to all the rain... Prior to this Abby had had no real experience of anyone or anything dying or what it really means, although it was until recently, one of her favourite topics of conversation.

After my initial horror and worry over nasty germs & viruses, making her immediately put these things down, and wash her hands over and over.....not quite believing what my eyes had actually seen – I *then* had to deal with the fall-out. **Abby was totally distraught.** You see, she had thought these baby mice could go in the cage with our pet mice and play together, and that they would be OK once they'd dried out.....

Well, she just cried and cried and cried.....she was not hysterical, but close! I hugged her and tried to comfort her, and tried to explain what must have happened.....but she was not to be comforted. She had wanted these mice for her own pets, and kept saying '*I'm really sad about the mice*' as if I hadn't realised this. [I had to hide my own shock and squeamish reactions to the fact that my little pink girly girl had scooped up, out of some dirty water, a handful of dead mice.....]

So this is why it would have been good to have been able to 'raise' the dead on Weds (I know – mice are generally a pest and most people would like them drowned, but try explaining that to a distraught 5 yr old who thought she was about to have a bunch of new pet mice!)

Needless to say, Pete's 'birthday lunch hour', instead of being a fun relaxed break from work, was spent burying the mice in a cross-marked grave (yes, we had to say prayers and everything) and washing all the places these dead mice had been.....

Each of the different strands of ministry are equally important and recognised here by Matthew, and in the church we too need to regain the balance, which *includes* expecting God to do some mighty works among us – healing the sick, deliverance ministry and all the rest! Of course it's not us *per se*, but God working through us by His Holy Spirit. And all these strands on ministry are part of outreach.....

5. Mission is STRATEGIC

Why did Jesus forbid entry into Samaritan / Gentile towns? Was he not concerned about these people? Well, we know he was from the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the compassionate way he treated the Samaritan woman as recounted in John 4.....

Jesus was concerned, but **now** was not the appropriate time.....Jesus had a **specific aim** for that particular occasion.

Jesus was concentrating on the mission to Israel during his human days on earth – the *'lost sheep of Israel'* – and Matthew was specifically writing for a Jewish audience and wanted to emphasise JC as Messiah come to care for his sheep.....JC **knew that the time for the Gentiles would come later**, as the Gospel spread out from its Judaic centre. Read the book of Acts, and then you'll see how it all began to happen.....

There **is** a place for strategy in Mission.

You know, it would be good as a congregation to sit down together and ask
“ What are we going to seek to do for God in the coming year, and the next few years?”

ie. We need a strategic plan under the direction of the Holy Spirit;

one which will flesh out our Mission statement – lets remind ourselves what it says

the Mission of St Aug's is to enable the experience of Jesus in our life and to share Christ in our community through the power of the Holy Spirit, reaching out to others in love. To know Christ and to make Him known.”

Because if we aim for nothing, we are sure to hit it !!

6. Mission is DEMANDING

.....of time and energy – spiritual, emotional and physical – as well as other resources.....and much more so for Jesus's disciples.....in v17-18 (which we didn't read today), Jesus says this –

“ be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues, ON my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles....”

And he talks about their being arrested. Later in v 23 he says *“ when they persecute you in one place, flee to another “* (10v23) – this happened in AD 70 when Jewish Christians left Jerusalem in response to prophecy, and migrated to

Pella. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. By AD 135 the Jewish Mission was finished.....

So Jesus sends them on this strategic, limited, temporary objective; it was **very** costly; it cost them **everything** they had, just as Christ's mission cost Him all he had..... *their* lot is identified with his.....

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven..” 10.32

Jesus does not offer us an easy ride. ‘A *disciple is not above his master, nor a servant above his master*’.

We must share sometimes in the mockery, the opposition and the hard times of the Jesus we follow. *“He who does not take up his cross (daily) and follow me is not worthy of me”*. There is an identity of calling, role and destiny between Jesus and His ambassadors.

7. Mission is ‘JESUS-SHAPED’

ALL THIS CENTRES AROUND HIM. The disciples are told to preach that the Kingdom is at hand. What does this mean except that Jesus is at hand? The Kingdom has arrived in the person of JC; the kingdom is **Jesus-shaped....**

Jesus gives the authority and commissions his disciples

Jesus sets the example and models how to do it

Jesus’ name determines whether they will be accepted or rejected.

And, like Jesus we are to **SEE** the need, **CARE** for the lost, **PRAY** before, during and after mission, **RECEIVE** the power of the Holy Spirit and whatever relevant training we can get, **GO** in teams or pairs to the lost, *expecting* God to work and trusting His Spirit to give us the right words as we share with our friends and family and neighbours, and being prepared to take any ‘flak’ that may come our way. Often we find ourselves **by** ourselves when it comes to sharing the good news with friends and neighbours, not in the safety of a pair or ‘team’.....so in those cases we really need the help and wisdom of God’s H/S.....

So, when you are planning your summer and thinking about how to best spend your time, you might like to pray about the ‘Mission’ opportunities that come your way.....to **pray** for those you’ll meet and to **look** for openings in conversations, so that you can help spread the Good News of Jesus Christ crucified, risen and ascended. And maybe at the other end of the summer we

can share our own stories that tell of God's working in our lives and the lives of those we are to meet.....**divine** meetings planned by Him.

End now with a true and amazing account of the mission of a man called Robin Talbot, a remarkable man whose life's ministry has been in the Far East. This came to us via email a few days ago from Ruach Ministries in the Shetland Isles, and exemplifies contemporary Mission and somebody who really stepped out in faith for God.....

Days of the Miraculous: The Ministry of Robin Talbot in Thailand

Robin received a dramatic call from God at the age of sixteen – first at a missionary meeting and then through reading a word from Scripture that touched him so deeply that he was immediately slain in the Spirit. After enduring two highly unsatisfactory years in secular work (during which time the Lord encouraged him to memorise a great deal of Scripture on the commuter train to work) he was accepted for mission work. No sooner had he completed arduous years of language learning than he was promptly reassigned to a region where they spoke an entirely different and still more complicated language.

He was even more mortified when the handful of Christians in the region he was working in told him, '*You teach well, but you have no power!*' Back in England on furlough he vowed not to return to the mission field unless or until he was '*clothed in power from on high*'.

His urgent seeking caused him to be filled very full of the Spirit – so much so that he was initially banned from preaching by the CIM (who did not support such a charismatic emphasis in those days) when he returned to Thailand. God was not thwarted; He merely directed missionaries from all over Asia to visit Robin in order to receive this special imparting of the Holy Spirit. But the little church in the Thai jungle remained obstinately empty, the few converts there having fallen away. God told him to devote himself to prayer – but for one thing only: *for people to be hungry for God*. He was also commanded to ask his prayer supporters back home to pray not for physical health or safety, nor even for financial provision but for the same thing.

And so they laboured together in prayer – and Robin continued to preach in an empty chapel. What came next can only be described as open heaven revival – a tremendous outpouring of the Spirit that swept many into the Kingdom, along with accompanying signs and miracles – including a number of people being raised from the dead. Many of the converts promptly set out on mission themselves, with the result that over the decades up to ten thousand new churches have been planted.

Such moves of God attract the devil's specific persecution. When the Viet Cong invaded north Thailand, armed groups made strenuous efforts to seize Robin. Resisting the temptation to flee, the Lord's angelic presence marvellously protected him on each occasion, even when they dug spear traps for him and put a gun to his back.

Years later, when he was working in the Himalayas, fanatical Hindus told him they were going to burn both him and his church down. Not surprisingly the hearts of the worshippers were filled with fear and heaviness – *until they remembered the spirit of thanksgiving*. It was at this point that one of the young boys saw a mighty angel with his wings spread out over the building. The spirit of confession came on a number of them. When the angry Hindus did burst in, they were so convicted by the sight of these young people confessing their sins that they caused no trouble whatsoever.

On another occasion in a remote pioneering village, Robin and his wife were witnessing to a group of yak-herdsmen. They were using a Flannelgraph to illustrate the gospel, when the Lord told him and his wife simultaneously to remove the fuzzy blanket from the wall and to hide it under the table. They leapt to obey Him. Seconds later, the police broke in, trying (and failing!) to find evidence of evangelistic activity. Several of the yaksmen gave their lives to the Lord as a result of that interrupted meeting.

Robin was at pains to stress that being led by the Spirit means having the faith to act on God's word. The Thai people he was associated with have many superstitions concerning serpents for instance, that it is a bad omen if one comes into your house. On one occasion, a deadly snake entered Robin's house and dug its fangs into his bare foot. As the poison shot up his leg and reached his groin, he realised that he was a 'gonner' unless he could stand on the promise of Luke 10:19: *'I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy; you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will harm you.'* (NLT) As his wife prayed and laid hands on Robin, he felt the poison going back down his legs and out through the fang-holes.

This miracle made a profound impression on the local people. No wonder Robin declares with such confidence that we live in the most exciting generation of all, when the power of God is being poured out as never before in history.