

Sermon for 14th June 2026, Year A, Pentecost 3, Proper 6

Preached at St Serf's Shettleston

Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:23

Sermon

When I look at the readings that the lectionary gives us for each Sunday, it's usually quickly apparent what I'm going to be saying in my sermon. Even if it's not obvious from the gospel itself, a quick glance at a commentary or two often gives me the necessary kickstart.

I confess I struggled a bit on this occasion. There's certainly a very clear story in the gospel reading about Jesus being Jesus, going about proclaiming God's kingdom and healing people, and then teaching his twelve disciples to do the same. I could certainly spend the next ten minutes talking about this passage, and giving explanations for all the rules that Jesus puts in place for his team of newbie missionaries – don't take your staff and sandals for example. But what's the relevance for us in this church in the East End today? After all, in this gospel passage, Jesus only lets the apostles go to the Jews, so we're not even included in the list of recipients of the healing that Jesus sends them out to do. It's only at the very end of Matthew's gospel that Jesus opens up the apostles' ministry to all the nations, rather than just the house of Israel.

We can of course gain some wisdom by temporarily inhabiting the lives of the disciples, first watching Jesus curing every disease and sickness and then imagining being told by him to go out and do the same. I wonder if we feel a sudden tightening in our chest and fear in our stomach as we imagine our excitement at all the wonderful ministry that Jesus is doing suddenly cut short by the realisation that now it's our turn. "Cure the sick, and raise the dead,"

says Jesus. Yep, no problem. We're on it. Just need two thousand years of medical advances, and we're good.

And as if that challenge weren't scary enough, Jesus warns the apostles that they'll be flogged, betrayed, persecuted, and hated. Oh joy. I'm so encouraged. Are you encouraged?

I wonder how the disciples felt. I wonder if they began to feel that they might have made a mistake, signing up for God's kingdom like this. It was all fun and games when Jesus was up front, safely leading the way, equal to every challenge, and all the disciples needed to do was watch and applaud, but now suddenly they're discovering just how unprepared they are.

What I think Jesus wants them to discover, is that what he is doing is not something only he can do, but something that normal everyday humans can do as well, even people without much education or learning – perhaps especially them. And so, he gloriously dumps them in at the deep end. No need for a backup plan or a stash of emergency cash just in case; they need to learn to rely on God and not themselves. And Jesus takes the issue of money right off the table. Compassion for others must be their motivation, not financial gain. They've freely received from God, so now they're called on to freely give.

We can listen to all this from the safe distance of two thousand years on. Jesus is not here in person to suddenly tell us that next week we're all going out on mission into the streets of the East End to proclaim God's kingdom, heal the sick and raise the dead – and don't bother wearing shoes or taking your walking stick. In any case, you might think that's what you're paying me for!

So, does this passage really have any sort of realistic message for us today?

Miracles of healing might not be an everyday occurrence in our lives, but what about having the courage to do readings or lead intercessions in church, or speak

out your testimony about how Jesus changed your life, or talk about God stuff over coffee, or while you're having your hair cut?

Do such things fill you with fear and dread, or maybe a sense of embarrassment? Well, I can certainly understand that. I remember in my early twenties when my church told me they wanted me to go door to door inviting people to our church services. I had only been a Christian for a year, and yet they expected me to knock on random doors and have conversations about Jesus. I was terrified of talking to people I didn't know. So, no; absolutely not. I couldn't imagine why anyone would want to do such a thing. I left the church instead. In fact, I left Christianity entirely, at least for a decade or so.

But I later came to realise that some people seem to have no problem taking huge personal risks to show people God's love. I know a young woman who after her university degree bought a one-way ticket from Wales to Uganda where she first worked for a Christian charity and then started her own, building schools for orphans and teaching impoverished women how to start micro-businesses making clothes. I know a man who repeatedly travelled the long, arduous and dangerous journey into northern Pakistan to set up free eye hospitals with a Christian ethos, risking capture by local militant leaders. He asked at one point if I might consider going with him, to do some IT work. I considered it, for five minutes. Then I realised I had somewhere else to be.

And I know many men and women who became monks and nuns, committing to lives of poverty, chastity, and obedience in lifelong service of God's love for all humanity, willing to go wherever in the world they're sent. How many of us have known people like this? Sometimes they're even in our own families.

But what motivates them? Why do some people sacrifice any and all financial or personal security and go off into wild and dangerous places to do this kind of thing? What is it about their faith that inspires them so profoundly?

Back in the days when I wasn't a Christian, I still occasionally watched people doing crazy Jesus things from afar. I remember one guy I met telling me that after a recent trip to Africa he was returning home to go through the long process of retraining to be a doctor just so he could return to Africa to serve as a medic there. Like Jesus, he'd seen a need and immediately gave himself entirely to meet it. At one point he too asked if I'd like to go with him. As usual, I declined. I was in awe of his compassion and commitment, and he was a charismatic and attractive young man, but I had plans to be prosperous thank you very much.

I still wonder what my life might have been like if I'd gone to live in those African villages, if my heart had been sufficiently full of compassion that I'd dared to go, if I'd been so full of love that I couldn't have done anything else.

I'm much more of a risk-taker now than I was in my twenties, though that's more a reflection of just how cautious and conventional I used to be. I know it usually goes the other way around, but back then I hadn't properly met Jesus yet. I hadn't seen Jesus at work, in my life or other people's lives.

Someone can come to church all their life but still be afraid to say anything about their faith in public. Meanwhile, another person who only came to faith last week, won't stop talking about God and how they're already planning to change career and join Médecins Sans Frontières.

I really do want everyone to meet God in this way. It is why I'm a priest. I'm honestly not here just to live in a comfortable rectory and lead services and visit people for tea and cake, lovely as those things are. I'm here to inspire you to seek Jesus with all your heart and mind and body and strength, so that when Jesus says, "Go and proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God is near," your heart leaps with joy and you go forth to do as he asks without a second thought or a moment's fear, because for you, the love of God is absolutely and completely real, and you absolutely *must* share it with everyone, right now.